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Twelve English Statesmen

PEEL

PEEL

BY

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

FAMILY, BIRTH, AND EDUCATION, 1788–1809 . . . 1

CHAPTER II

PARLIAMENT AND OFFICE, 1809–1818 18

CHAPTER III

THE CURRENCY AND THE CRIMINAL LAW, 1819–1827 . 43

CHAPTER IV

CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION, 1827–1829 . . . 63

CHAPTER V

THE REFORM OF PARLIAMENT, 1830–1833 . . . 92

CHAPTER VI

THE REFORMED PARLIAMENT AND THE CRISIS OF 1834, 1833–1835 119

CHAPTER VII

PAGE

FOUR MONTHS OF OFFICE, AND SIX YEARS OF OPPOSITION, 1835–1841 143

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADMINISTRATION OF 1841, 1841–1846 175

CHAPTER IX

PEEL AND O'CONNELL, 1841–1845 204

CHAPTER X

THE REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS, 1845–1846 218

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION, 1846–1850 238

CHAPTER I

FAMILY, BIRTH, AND EDUCATION

1788–1809

SIR ROBERT PEEL, twice Prime Minister of England in the first half of the present century, was born in 1788, the year before the assembling of the States-General in France, and died in 1850, the year before the opening of the first Great Exhibition of the Arts and Industries of all nations in England. Between these two epochs, the opening of the democratic age and the close of the long period of European peace, the political career of Peel is included. His childhood witnessed the beginning of the revolutionary wars, and he was nurtured by his father in the fear and admonition of Pitt. He first took office in 1810, having entered Parliament in the previous year; but it is to the period of European peace, which opened in 1815 and lasted until 1854, more than three years after his death, that the political history of his life belongs. He began life as the colleague of Liverpool and Castlereagh, of Sidmouth and Eldon, and his earlier sympathies were with the less liberal tendencies of that illiberal *régime*. He ended his career estranged from his own party, and associated with only a section of his personal friends and followers, who

supported the Whig Government of 1846, and within a dozen years became finally absorbed into the Liberal ranks. His whole political life is, to the superficial observer and to the mere partisan politician, a succession of paradoxes, inconsistencies, and contradictions. He was himself the soul of honour, a very pattern of political integrity, a patriot devoted before all public or private aims to the peace, welfare, and good government of his country. Yet by his contemporaries he was perpetually assailed as a traitor to his party and his principles, a slave to expediency and opportunism, a consummate but unscrupulous master of the less reputable arts of parliamentary management. He supported the inept finance of Vansittart, and a few years afterwards he recanted his errors and gave effect to the sounder principles of Horner and the famous Bullion Committee of 1810. The inconsistency of his conduct in the matter of Catholic emancipation in 1829 and of free trade in 1846 is one of the tritest commonplaces of modern political history. Yet Peel is now adjudged by all to have been the ablest statesman of his time, the one statesman, perhaps, who by his ascendency over the party of reaction and resistance could have piloted the State without disaster through the tremendous organic changes which were brought about by the restoration of peace, the growth of the industrial spirit, and the advance of democratic reform.

Sir Robert Peel was born on 5th July 1788, either at Chamber Hall, near Bury, the residence of his father, a wealthy manufacturer of the district, or at a small cottage in the near neighbourhood, the family mansion having been, according to the legend, under repair at

the time of his birth. He was the third child and eldest son of his father, who had married in 1783 Miss Ellen Yates, the eldest daughter of his partner in the firm, then well known, of Haworth, Peel, and Yates, calico-printers and cotton-manufacturers of Bury. The family had long been established in Lancashire, and passed through many vicissitudes, sinking ultimately to the rank of yeomen, though its origin has been traced through the Peeles of the Peele in Bolton by Bolland, a parish in the West Riding, and their lineal ancestors the Boltons, Lords of Bolton, to Turchil, son of Ligulf, one of the principal lieutenants of Sweyn and Canute. Robert Peele of Blackburn, who died in 1577, is the first of whom we hear in connection with Hole or Hoyle House, near Blackburn, where the statesman's ancestors lived as yeomen for several generations. His great grandson, another Robert Peele, who is said to have been a woollen manufacturer, and certainly raised the fortunes of his family, purchased from a kinsman named Oldham a property near Blackburn, known indifferently as Oswaldtwistle or Oldham's Cross, and gave it the name of Peele or Peel Fold, though it still continued to be called the Cross in legal documents, and this property passed successively to his son William and his grandson Robert, who was the father of the first baronet and the grandfather of the statesman.[1] This Robert

[1] These details, which differ materially from those given by Sir Lawrence Peel in his *Sketch of the Life and Character of Sir Robert Peel*, are derived from a privately-printed memoir on the genealogy of the Peels, compiled by the late Mr. Jonathan Peel of Knowlmere Manor, the grandson of a younger brother of the first baronet. The writer is indebted to Miss Maud Peel of Knowlmere for a copy of her father's work, and for other interesting information.

Peel of Peel Fold was the true founder of the fortunes of the Peel family. He began life as a farmer at Peel Fold, and in 1744 he married Elizabeth Haworth, the daughter of a neighbour of somewhat better family, but of no higher fortune than his own—this being the second of twelve marriages between the families of Peel and Haworth. His brother-in-law, Mr. Haworth, is said to have been the first calico-printer in Lancashire. Haworth had learnt the business in London, and returning to his native county he invited Robert Peel to join him in the business he proposed to establish. Peel was a man of good education, taciturn, thoughtful, inventive, and withal enterprising and determined. After listening to Haworth's proposals, he consented to mortgage the family property in order to provide capital for the projected enterprise. But, as his resources and Haworth's did not prove sufficient, they agreed to take into partnership another neighbour named Yates, whose parents are said to have kept or owned an inn called the "Black Bull" at Blackburn, and who seems to have inherited or acquired a small capital from that source.

Thus was founded the celebrated firm of Haworth, Peel, and Yates, and the still more celebrated family of Peel, which in little more than a century has given a Prime Minister to the country, a Speaker to the House of Commons, and a succession of distinguished names to many departments of public life. Robert Peel of Peel Fold was a man eminently qualified for success in business. He came to it at a time when the progress of invention was beginning to secure for England its

supremacy in textile manufactures. His reflective habits and his mechanical aptitudes probably enabled him to foresee and appreciate the mighty change which was about to be wrought in the social and commercial fabric of his native land. When he mortgaged his family property and engaged in the business of a calico-printer, he foreshadowed and exemplified that change. He was one of those sterling Englishmen, self-centred, industrious, upright, and intelligent, who are wont to say, and to prove, that a man may do and be whatsoever he chooses to do and be. The eighteenth century has no good name with some historians. It is thought to be prosaic, commonplace, displaying no high aims and no noble ideals. So it may be to the transcendental scorner of homely integrity and unpretending worth. But the eighteenth century witnessed in England the unexampled transformation of a society based on agriculture into a society based on commerce. It found men in abundance ready to effect the change, and capable of effecting it without parade or pretence on the one hand, and without convulsion on the other. Robert Peel of Peel Fold was a sample of these men. They were men of no illustrious lineage, of no eminent station, as station and lineage are vulgarly esteemed. But they and their forefathers before them had trodden in the simple ways of English integrity and thrift, and when the time came for them to emerge from honourable obscurity into fame and eminence, they were equal to the change, and became the pioneers of that great movement which has made the England of to-day. If a tree is to be judged by its fruits, it is not for the nineteenth century to despise the eighteenth.

The business of Haworth, Peel, and Yates prospered, but not without vicissitudes. It had its rivals and its enemies. The introduction of machinery provoked the animosity of the old handloom workers, and the factory established by the firm was at one time wrecked by rioters. This induced Robert Peel of Peel Fold to remove from Blackburn to Burton-on-Trent, where he built three new mills and constructed a canal at a cost of £9000 to supply one of them with water. His third son, Robert, father of the statesman, was born in the year 1750. Robert inherited the sterling qualities of both his parents. Robert Peel of Peel Fold was nicknamed "the Philosopher" by his neighbours at Burton, from his occasional absence of mind and his habits of taciturnity and reflection. There was, indeed, a vein of seriousness, of reserve, almost of melancholy, running through the whole stock of Peels. This was corrected in Robert Peel, the first baronet, by the sturdy thrifty, north-country temperament of his mother, whose character is displayed in her fond desire to live a few months after her husband. "I should like," she said, "to stay by thee to the last and keep thee all right." The family temperament reappeared in Robert Peel the statesman, who, being both sensitive and passionate in temper, was not sociable as a boy, was distant and unsociable as a man, except towards a very few intimates, reserved and almost impenetrable as a minister, and never lost that painful sense of shyness and provinciality which made Wellington say of him that "Peel has no manners." In Robert Peel, the first baronet, however, this family touch of self-consciousness and self-distrust was masked by more active qualities. He was a man

of brain and energy, imbued early with a conviction that he was to make a great fortune and to found a great family. His father's prosperity came to him late in life. Robert Peel was his third son, and at the age of eighteen he desired to make an independent career for himself, telling his father "that they were too thick upon the ground." He accordingly asked for £500 to begin life with. The request was not granted, but five years afterwards Robert Peel was taken into the firm of Haworth, Peel, and Yates, now established at Bury, his uncle, the head of the firm, having selected him as the most capable and promising among the sons of his brother-in-law. The young man worked hard and lived frugally, as his father had done before him, and it was not until he was thirty-three years of age that he married the daughter, Ellen, then aged eighteen, of his partner Mr. Yates. By this time Haworth had left the business and Robert Peel had become its mainstay, Yates, who remained senior partner, being content to leave matters almost entirely in the capable hands of his future son-in-law. By the time of his marriage he had prospered greatly, and had laid the foundation of the colossal fortune which he left to his children at his death in 1830. Following the example of his father, and not altogether trusting to the forbearance of the Lancashire operatives, he established a branch of his business at Tamworth, where eventually he built Drayton Manor, the well-known residence of himself and his illustrious son, who rebuilt and greatly enlarged the original structure; but though as early as 1790 his father had been returned to Parliament for Tamworth, the boyish days of the statesman were spent in the

neighbourhood of Blackburn. To the end of his life the second Sir Robert never entirely lost the somewhat uncouth Lancashire accent acquired in those early days. It may be that, entering public life in the days when most leading politicians were high born, and even Canning was branded as an adventurer, Peel owed much of his awkwardness and reserve to a consciousness of his lowly origin and his provincial accent.

Robert Peel, the member for Tamworth, was created a baronet by patent in 1800 on the recommendation of Mr. Pitt. He was a staunch Tory in politics and a warm admirer of Pitt. But his politics were a sentiment and perhaps a tradition rather than a body of reasoned opinions. He came of a stock which was naturally sober, steady, and conservative in temper. Like many others who have prospered greatly in business, he gave wholly to commercial pursuits the intelligence and clear-sightedness which might in other circumstances have enlarged his views on some of the broader issues of politics and finance. As early as 1780 he had published a pamphlet entitled "The National Debt productive of National Prosperity," and to the end of his life he never abandoned this delusion. He was an active opponent of the measure for the resumption of cash payments, introduced on the recommendation of his son in 1819. In a sense he was right, no doubt, in attributing the prosperity of his class to the measures of Pitt. "Rents had never been so high," says the historian to whom nearly every page of this biography is deeply indebted, "profits had never been so large, as during the continuance of the war. The manufacturing industries of the country had never previously ex-

perienced so marvellous a development. The hum of the workshop was heard in places which had previously only been disturbed by the whirr of the grouse; and new forces, undreamed of a century before, were employed to assist the progress of production. The trade of the United Kingdom acquired an importance which it had never previously enjoyed, and the manufacturing classes obtained an influence which they had never before known. The landowners were slowly losing the monopoly of power which they had enjoyed for centuries. Traders and manufacturers were daily obtaining fresh wealth and influence. A new England was supplanting the old country; and agriculture, the sole business of our forefathers, was gradually becoming of less importance than trade. . . . The predominance of the British at sea had driven every enemy from the ocean, and had enabled British merchants to ply their trade in comparative safety. The numerous possessions which the British had acquired in every part of the globe had provided them with customers in all parts of the world; and the most civilised, as well as the most savage, of nations were purchasing the produce of the looms of Manchester and of the factories of Birmingham. Even the taxation which the war had necessitated had stimulated the manufacturers to fresh exertions. The merchants were continually discovering fresh outlets for British trade; the manufacturers were constantly encouraged to increase their produce."[1]

All these advantages the first Sir Robert Peel, Tory as he was by temperament and training, attributed to the policy and genius of Pitt. As a merchant and

[1] Walpole, *History of England*, vol. i., p. 50.

manufacturer he profited by the enlargement of the Empire, as a landowner he did not lose by the depreciation of the currency. As often happens with practical men, he perceived the effect and profited by it, though he failed to trace it to its cause. The commercial development of England was due, not so much to the campaigns and alliances of Pitt, nor to the victories of Nelson, as to the peaceful inventions of Hargreaves, Arkwright, and Watt. As a man of business Sir Robert Peel was under no illusions on this point; he was keenly alive to the progress of invention, and he was among the first to perceive the change in industrial organisation it was destined to accomplish by the substitution of the factory system for the isolated labour of the homestead; to his infinite credit it must be recorded also that he was among the first to recognise that the factory system involved and required some legislative restriction on the labour of women and children. As a man of business he was one of Pitt's principal advisers on all questions relating to commerce and trade; as a politician he requited the confidence thus reposed in him by his unswerving support of the minister's measures and his enthusiastic admiration of his character and policy. But he was a man of business first, a politician by the accident of fortune, a Tory by nature, and a follower of Pitt above all.

When the eldest son of this enterprising and ambitious merchant was born to him in 1788, five years after his marriage, he is said to have fallen on his knees and vowed in thankfulness that "he would give his child to his country." There is, at any rate, good authority for saying that a similar vow was solemnly

uttered in church when the child was baptized. It is certain that from the earliest days the father had determined that his son should be a statesman, and so notorious did this determination become that it caused the young man no little vexation and embarrassment on his first entry into public life. His stiff manners seemed to bespeak the gravity of the future minister; but though not perhaps over-modest, he was far too sensible not to know that a man rises in public life by his own merits, and not by parental predestination. His father's ambition only involved a reserved and sensitive nature in unmerited ridicule at the outset of a promising career.

But though the first Sir Robert Peel could not make his son a minister, he could provide him with an opening in public life, and could give him an education and training which might fit him to become a statesman. In this he was only following the example of the father of his own political hero, Pitt. Pitt, however, was trained by a great minister, Peel by a great manufacturer. The training in the latter case was not altogether judicious. Born in a Tory home, the young Peel was sent to a Tory school, graduated in a Tory university, and took office in a Tory administration before he was twenty-five years of age. At school, both at Bury and afterwards at Harrow, he was shy, studious, attentive to his studies, and less of a boy than his contemporaries. His cousin relates that he would walk a mile round sooner than encounter the rude jests of the Bury lads. At home he was rarely allowed to forget the destiny that awaited him. His father was fond of lifting the child on to a table and making

him recite some boyish lesson. On Sundays he was encouraged to repeat as much as he could recollect of the sermon he had heard in church. His memory was thus strengthened, until it became extraordinarily capacious and tenacious. Macaulay's memory was a marvel, but the contemporaries of both used to doubt whether Peel's was not equal to it. With the finer and rarer qualities of mind he was not perhaps exceptionally gifted, nor was his early training particularly well adapted to the correction of his native deficiencies. The account given by Byron of his schoolfellow has often been quoted, but it is so exact an illustration of the boy as father to the man that it must do service once more: "Peel, the orator and statesman that was, or is, or is to be, was my formfellow, and we were both at the top of our remove. We were on good terms, but his brother was my intimate friend; there were always great hopes of Peel amongst us all, masters and scholars, and he has not disappointed them. As a scholar he was greatly my superior; as a declaimer and actor I was reckoned at least his equal; as a schoolboy out of school I was always in scrapes, and he never; and in school he always knew his lesson, and I rarely, but when I knew it I knew it nearly as well; and in general information, history, etc., I think I was his superior as well as of most boys of my standing."

At the age of eighteen Peel quitted school and was sent to Oxford, being entered as a gentleman commoner at Christ Church, then and long afterwards the most distinguished college in the University. Cyril Jackson was dean, and Charles Lloyd, afterwards Bishop of

Oxford and to the end of his days Peel's intimate friend and confidential adviser, became his tutor. At Oxford Peel seems to have lost something of his native stiffness and reserve. He dressed in the fashion of the day, he rode, he boated, he cricketed, in fact he lived very much as young men of wealth and station always have lived, and always will live, at the University. In those days boating, cricketing, and the like were not the serious business they have now become. They were pastimes, not occupations. He was not a regular sporting man, for though he rode to hounds, he was never a good rider. The sport he cared for most was that of shooting. As with Walpole, the letters of his gamekeeper were often given precedence in his correspondence over communications on State affairs; and on his first release from office he spent one of his earliest holidays in the heart of the Highlands, and described his achievements on the moor to his friend Croker with all the relish of a true sportsman. But shooting is a sport which rarely interferes with Oxford studies, and though Peel enjoyed life at Oxford, he also studied, not hard but steadily. The Class List, that new system of examination which was to stamp so many statesmen and scholars, had been instituted in the first years of the century, but it was not until 1807 that the examination had been divided into the two schools of classics and mathematics. Peel, who at school always "knew his lesson," presented himself for honours in both. He came out a "double first," being the first of Oxford men ever to achieve that honour, and standing alone in the first class in mathematics. There were four others in the first class in classics, of whom the only man subsequently known

to fame was Ashhurst Gilbert, afterwards Principal of Brasenose and Bishop of Chichester. But in the second class were R. D. Hampden, afterwards Bishop of Hereford, whose nomination to that see caused so much stir, and Richard Whately, the famous Archbishop of Dublin. Both of these achieved also a second class in mathematics. In those early days the examination was conducted almost entirely *viva voce*, and the fame of a brilliant examination long resounded through the University. Peel, it is said, achieved this fame, as was natural for a young man of whom much was already hoped, and his examination was long talked of.

It has been said that Peel's education and early associations were not such as to correct the native limitations of his character and intelligence. He was born a Tory and bred a Tory in the days when toryism was represented by Lord Eldon and by all the repressive and reactionary tendencies engendered by a long war. Yet he never was a Tory, in this sense, himself; his intelligence was too open, too ready at all times to yield to conviction, however unwelcome. Had he been born a Whig, or had his father been one of those men who combined commercial enterprise with popular sympathies, who could see in their own rise to importance in the State a symptom of momentous change, political and social, his career would have been more consistent, more harmonious, less liable to misconstruction, less injurious to the stability of party connection. Would it have been more beneficial to the State? The question is not easy to answer. We are apt to regard party distinctions and party connections as more stable, more immutable, than they really are or

ought to be. Between the conservative and progressive types of human mind and character, the conservative and progressive forces whose resultant is the march of human affairs, the difference is, in the abstract, radical and fundamental. In the concrete, however, both types are often represented in the same individual, both forces are essential to the conservation of political society. Human society is founded upon order and lives by progress. The essential distinctions of political party correspond to these two essential elements of human society. Both are necessary to the State; each is the complement of the other. If either party were left exclusively to its own bias and bent, society would either moulder in stagnation or perish in revolution. But these alternative catastrophes are prevented by the fact that parties are composed of men, and that in all men, though one tendency or the other may predominate, both tendencies exist. No man would avow himself hostile to all change; few men desire to sacrifice order in the pursuit of progress.

Parties are thus, in the abstract, associations of men concerned in the conduct of public affairs who adopt respectively opposing principles of action. But in the temporary abeyance of organic differences any principle which circumstances may suggest and honest men can be persuaded to accept will serve for the basis of party distinction. When this happens the distinction of parties becomes artificial and not natural, and the last stage of political infidelity is reached when the only discernible principle of party action is that of resisting and thwarting the measures proposed by the opposite party. These are the times when honest and independent men act

sometimes with one party, sometimes with another. They engender "opportunism," as it has been called, in the leaders of a party, lassitude and bewilderment in their followers. A period of confusion ensues, accompanied by much moral perplexity and political tergiversation, and this lasts until parties are once more divided according to natural lines of cleavage.

Peel entered public life just before the beginning of one of these periods of confusion. The Tories were nominally the party of order and the Whigs the party of progress; though what really divided them was not this fundamental distinction of human nature and human society, but the policy and conduct of the war. The Tories had conducted the war with vigour, determination, and undaunted endurance. *Inter arma silent leges.* Organic reform is incompatible with a struggle for national existence, and therefore so long as the war lasted it was natural that the Tory party should maintain its ascendency. But no sooner was the war over than the new forces engendered by the mechanical inventions and the consequent commercial expansion of the last century began to exert their influence. The Tory party as then constituted was incapable of adapting itself to the new conditions of national existence. It had so long been accustomed to present a front of steel to all proposals of change that it could not readily be brought to acknowledge that there are temperatures at which even steel may be fused. How then was the party of resistance to be reconciled to necessary and inevitable change? Its position in the House of Lords was impregnable to assault, and until the Reform Bill was passed in 1832 it was dominant in the House of Com-

mons as well. The history of the Reform Bill shows that the Whigs were compelled to go within measurable distance of revolution in order to effect constitutional changes which every one now sees to have been necessary. Even ten years later, in 1842, Charles Greville summed up the political situation in the sagacious and pregnant maxim that "the Tories only can carry Liberal measures." But four years earlier, when the sovereign was hostile, the House of Lords paramount, and the country indifferent, when the peace of Ireland and the welfare of the Empire depended on concession to the Catholic claims, the Whigs would have been powerless to carry the needful measure even if Peel had been on their side. Certain questions connected with this great crisis will be more conveniently discussed hereafter: for the present it is sufficient to say that if Peel had not been nominally a Tory and really a statesman, the Catholic question of 1828 might have ended in revolution.

CHAPTER II

PARLIAMENT AND OFFICE

1809–1818

It was in Michaelmas term 1808, when he had just passed his twentieth year, that Peel took his degree at Oxford. In the following year a seat in Parliament was procured for him in the Irish borough of Cashel, and the young man took his seat, as a matter of course, on the same side of the House as his father. His whole training had fitted and destined him for association with the Tory party. Peel could not have been a Whig; he was not born in the conditions necessary for the growth of that peculiar and indigenous product of English political life. To be a Liberal was equally impossible for him. Liberalism, as an independent factor in politics, was the creation of the Reform Bill; before 1832 it was merely the left wing of the Whig party, and those who represented it independently were the product of training and associations to which Peel was altogether a stranger. He became a Tory because his father was a Tory before him, and because neither his training nor his character led him to consider independently the grounds on which his political connection was based.

There is a legend, narrated both by Guizot and Greville, to the effect that the elder Peel warned Lord Liverpool that if his son were not speedily given office in the Ministry, he would join the Whigs and be lost for ever to the Tory party. Greville discredits the story, which he says was told by Arbuthnot to the Duke of Bedford, but Guizot evidently believed it. There is some discrepancy between the two versions, but neither seems consistent with facts and dates. If there is any truth whatever in the story, it may be referred with greater probability to the period between 1818 and 1822, when the elder Peel was still alive, when Arbuthnot was still a member of the Government and a confidential adviser of its chiefs, and when the younger Peel had retired from office, was not altogether easy in his political connections and prospects, and according to Croker, was more than half inclined to withdraw from public life altogether. It was during this period, which will engage our attention in greater detail hereafter, that he wrote to Croker on 23d March 1820 as follows: "Do you not think that the tone of England—of that great compound of folly, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy, and newspaper paragraphs, which is called public opinion—is more liberal, to use an odious but intelligible phrase, than the policy of the Government? Do not you think that there is a feeling, becoming daily more general and more confirmed, that is, independent of the pressure of taxation or any immediate cause, in favour of some undefined change in the mode of governing the country? It seems to me a curious crisis, when public opinion never had such influence on public measures, and yet never was so

dissatisfied with the share which it possessed. It is growing too large for the channels that it has been accustomed to run through. God knows it is very difficult to widen them exactly in proportion to the size and force of the current which they have to convey, but the engineers that made them never dreamt of various streams that are now struggling for a vent. Will the Government act on the principles on which, without being very certain, I suppose they have hitherto professed to act? Or will they carry into action moderate Whig measures of reform? Or will they give up the Government to the Whigs, and let them carry those measures into effect? Or will they coalesce with the Whigs, and oppose the united phalanx to the Hobhouses and Burdetts of radicalism? I should not be surprised to see such an union." A man who wrote thus in 1820, after ten years of parliamentary experience, might well be supposed by his father, a Tory trained in the later school of Pitt, to be harbouring Whig proclivities; and this impression would be strengthened by the fact that only a year previously Peel had given a great shock to his father by openly adopting and successfully recommending to Parliament the financial heresies, as the elder Sir Robert always regarded them, of Horner and the Bullion Committee of 1810. But that the young Peel, on entering public life in 1809, should have caused his father misgiving as to the orthodoxy of his political opinions and the fidelity of his political connections is a legend repugnant to all probability.

In point of fact few young men, however promising in talents and character, and however carefully trained for a public career, have donned the official harness and

the livery of a party so early as Peel did. In his first session he was silent and observant. At the opening of his second session he was selected to second the Address, and acquitted himself with credit, though without remarkable distinction. A few weeks afterwards he defended the action of the Government in connection with the Walcheren expedition, and it was this speech which apparently recommended him for the post of private secretary to Lord Liverpool. In the collection of his parliamentary speeches, which occupies four bulky volumes, only one other speech appears delivered before the year 1812. This was a speech delivered on 18th March 1811 on the proposal of a grant of two millions for the maintenance of a body of Portuguese troops in the service of the British Crown. By this time Peel was Under-Secretary for the Colonies, and in those days the office held by Lord Liverpool, his official chief, was that entitled "Secretary of State for the Department of War and Colonies," so that Peel's speech on this occasion was practically an official utterance on behalf of the department he represented. It is remarkable chiefly for a laboured but somewhat frigid panegyric upon Lord Wellington, with which the orator concluded. The only other speech which Peel made before he became Chief-Secretary for Ireland was delivered on 3d February 1812 in opposition to a motion made by Lord Morpeth for a committee on the state of Ireland. He combated the Catholic claims with a few of the flimsiest of commonplaces; but it is worthy of note that he concluded by saying that "in giving his vote on the present occasion he would by no means pledge himself with regard to the Catholic question, but would merely give his negative

to a motion which, in the present instance, was at least unnecessary."

The leading men of the Tory party at the time when Peel entered the House of Commons in 1809 were Perceval, Castlereagh, Liverpool, and Canning. Of these Perceval was Prime Minister at the time—the others, with the exception of Castlereagh, who for many years was Prime Minister in everything but the name, each became Prime Minister in his turn. On Perceval the judgment pronounced by history has been perhaps too severe. He is remembered rather as the butt of Sydney Smith's sarcasms, the commonplace politician and respectable family man, than as the minister who supported Wellington at the critical outset of the Peninsular campaigns, and the leader of the House of Commons whose parliamentary authority and public estimation grew steadily from the day he became Prime Minister until the day of his death. He was no genius certainly, but genius in politics is a rare and dangerous gift. He was a wretched financier, but in this respect he was no worse than most of his contemporaries. There was little generosity and no expansion in his political ideas. He was an inflexible opponent of the Catholic claims. His toryism was of a type which had grown obsolete even before the Reform Bill. It was as unyielding as Eldon's; in other words, it was of adamant. His speeches are never quoted; no great measure is connected with his name. He was no master of that oratory which charms the imagination, fascinates the reason, and enthrals the will. But he was a great parliamentary leader, a speaker who never mistook the temper of the House of Commons, a tactician of rare experience and address, a

minister who, though he could not have originated a policy, could pursue a policy originated for him with the patient doggedness begotten of a narrow creed and a contracted intelligence. His personal disinterestedness and inflexibility were proverbial. His faults as a politician were mainly those of his creed and time.

Lord Liverpool was the "arch-mediocrity" of Disraeli. There is little more to be said of him except that, arch-mediocrity as he was, he was Prime Minister of England for more than fifteen years, a period reached by none of his successors and surpassed only by Walpole and Pitt among his predecessors; that throughout his political life he was hardly ever out of office, having held at different times every secretaryship of State, and nearly every other office which is associated with a seat in the Cabinet. He was never the master-spirit in his own Government; he was never more than the titular leader of the Tory party. Palmerston, who contentedly served under him for fifteen years without being admitted to the Cabinet, called him a "spoony"; Castlereagh and Canning usurped his authority in turn. He held his position, however, in virtue of the principle which, according to Thiers, recommended the Republic in France; his nominal supremacy divided the several sections of his followers the least. His long official experience, his wide conversance with public affairs, and his tact in dealing with men recommended him as the chief of a Ministry which was kept in office not by its own merits, but by the military achievements of Wellington. Thus it happened that a man whom one of his successors called a spoony and another an arch-mediocrity, who stands in history as the incarnation of Tory misrule,

was the minister whose government overthrew Napoleon and concluded a peace which lasted for nearly forty years.

Castlereagh is the statesman whom the popular instinct of his own and later times has identified with the evil spirit of anti-popular government. In Ireland his name stands for the cruelty with which the rebellion of 1798 was repressed and the corruption with which the Union was carried; in England it stands for the Six Acts and the policy they represented; in Europe for the Holy Alliance. When he died the country rejoiced; when he was buried the mob of Westminster cheered in triumph. He was the scapegoat of that obsolete toryism which went out of office with Eldon, and was finally extinguished by the Reform Bill. Yet Castlereagh, though trained in a narrow school and fallen on evil times, was a statesman. He was equal, and more than equal, to every position he occupied. His Irish policy was odious in its methods, but successful in its results, and it must be recorded in his honour that he never faltered in his support of the Catholic claims. At the Congress of Vienna he held his own among the assembled statesmen of Europe; and if in the settlement of 1815 the rights of peoples were subordinated to the will of kings, it must be remembered that, to the Tory mind of that age, the rights of peoples were only another name for those revolutionary ideas which England and Europe had combated for more than twenty years. He led the House of Commons for ten years, with Canning chafing at his side and Peel fast rising to eminence and authority. He had neither the commanding eloquence of the one, nor the administrative capacity of the other;

but his authority was never seriously questioned by either, and he retained his ascendency until his death. He had a noble presence and a winning manner, but his speech was contemptible; it was inarticulate, inelegant, ungrammatical, and provincial, but it was never indiscreet. He ruled the House of Commons by prudence, tact, good-humour, and by the ascendency of a great name, great achievements, and an engaging personality. Posterity has done him less than justice; his contemporaries erred perhaps on the other side.

Canning was incomparably the greatest man and the greatest statesman of the four. Of the statesmen who succeeded Pitt he was perhaps the only one gifted with an original and soaring political genius. His eloquence was unrivalled, his capacity incontestable. But by the Tory magnates he was regarded as an adventurer, and to nearly all his contemporaries he seemed to be a schemer. He was born to inspire, to control, to command, and he could brook no rival or superior. Hence it was that from 1810 to 1815—those critical years in which the Peninsular campaigns, first inspired by him, were fought and the peace of Europe was restored—his services were lost to the State and the fate of nations was left to the uncovenanted mercies of the Liverpools and the Castlereaghs, the Eldons and the Sidmouths. This was the *gran rifiuto* of Canning's political life; but it was not made *per viltate*. Canning had his faults; but his character was pre-eminently noble, compact of generous ideas and lofty ambitions. He had been, it is said, a Jacobin in his youth; but Pitt found him a seat in Parliament, and he soon attached himself to the Tory party—a compliment which the Tory party never

cordially returned. Had the fates been more propitious, it might have been his mission to do for the Tory party before the Reform Bill all that Peel did for it in after days, and a great deal more besides. Tory as he was, in the best sense of the word, his mind was always aglow with the inspiration of the future. He called, as he proudly said, a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old when he recognised the South American Republics; and though the immortal phrase is scarcely appropriate to the circumstances which gave it birth, it reveals in a more general application the true source of Canning's political inspiration. Had he lived he might have called a new order of things into existence to take the place of the old, which was fast passing away. He died, and left only a noble example and an imperishable name; but he left also—such is the irony of fate and the tyranny of circumstance—a shattered party, a bewildered nation, and a State threatened with revolution.

The period which intervened between Peel's entry into Parliament in 1809 and his assumption of independent office as Chief-Secretary for Ireland in the administration of Lord Liverpool in 1812, is one full of political perplexity, party confusion, and individual intrigue. Perceval became Prime Minister in the autumn of 1809, after the intrigue of Canning against Castlereagh, followed by their memorable duel, had rendered both those statesmen impossible and compelled the Duke of Portland to resign. So weak were Perceval and his colleagues after the secession of Canning and Castlereagh, that they persuaded the king to allow them to make overtures to Grenville and Grey. These overtures

were rejected with scorn, Lord Grenville being implacable and Lord Grey even refusing to come to London for the purpose of conferring with the minister. The Whig leaders were counting on the weakness of the Ministry and the health of the king. Should the king's health again give way and the Prince of Wales be appointed regent, they reckoned on the return of their own party to power. But their calculations were utterly disconcerted—first, by the ability unexpectedly displayed by Perceval, who, without being a great statesman, was a capable parliamentary leader; secondly, by the change in the political opinions and attitude of the regent; and above all, by the successes of Lord Wellington in the Peninsula. It was indeed Wellington who kept Perceval in power. The Whigs attacked his strategy and denounced the policy of the ministers who defended and sustained him. But by so doing they damaged themselves in public estimation, and once more incurred that charge of want of patriotism which had proved so fatal to the political career of Fox. They also indirectly strengthened a Ministry which no one expected to last when it was first formed, which was no match for them in debate, was not conspicuous for individual ability nor strong in parliamentary following.

The king's sanity was finally overthrown by the death of his favourite daughter, the Princess Amelia, in 1810. Ministers waited for a decent interval in the hopes of his recovery, and then brought forward their proposals for the regency of the Prince of Wales. The powers of the regent were to be restricted for a time in order that, if the king should recover, the prerogatives of the Crown might return to him unim-

paired by the temporary devolution; and the Whigs, who expected to be summoned forthwith to form a Government, were disappointed to find that the regent declined to change the confidential advisers of the Crown. In a letter written to Perceval the day before the Regency Bill was passed, the prince communicated his intention of retaining the king's ministers, alleging his desire to do nothing which "might in the smallest degree have the effect of interfering with the progress of his sovereign's recovery." So completely were the Whigs nonplussed that later in the year, when they had begun to see the wisdom of doing justice to Wellington, and Lord Grey in the House of Lords had not ungenerously made amends for his former intemperate attacks on the general and the Ministry, Lord Liverpool wrote to Wellington: "Perceval's character is completely established in the House of Commons. He has acquired an authority there beyond any minister within my recollection except Pitt. Our weak side," he added, "is Ireland, and so it will remain for many years."

Ireland indeed was the weak side of the Ministry, as it had been of every Ministry which had held office since the Union, and as it was destined to be, as Lord Liverpool foretold, for many years to come. Catholic emancipation had, however, been to some extent an open question even in the administration of Perceval. It was well understood that the question was not to be mooted by Government during the king's lifetime, but individual ministers were at liberty to vote in favour of the Catholic claims. Wellesley, who was Foreign Secretary, was known to be in favour of them, though he

supported his colleagues in resisting a motion made in the House of Lords in 1812 for a committee on the condition of Ireland. He quitted the Ministry immediately afterwards, though not apparently on account of any difference on this subject, and his place was taken by Castlereagh, who was also known to be in favour of the Catholic claims. It was at the same time that Peel, as we have seen, in opposing a similar motion in the House of Commons, declined to pledge himself unreservedly on the question. Indeed it might well have seemed at this moment, even to the opponents of Catholic emancipation, that the Catholic question was fast becoming ripe for settlement. Liverpool himself, in the debate in the House of Lords already mentioned, spoke with a reserve similar to that of Peel, and it may well be conjectured that the Secretary of State and his Under-Secretary had come to a previous understanding on the subject. It was not known then, though it became clear a short time later, that the regent had adopted his father's views on the subject. The overtures made to Grenville and Grey in 1809 showed that parties were so artificially divided that a coalition was not impossible, and such a coalition, under a sovereign favourable to a measure of emancipation, might have resulted in a speedy settlement of the Catholic question.

Such calculations, however, were soon to be overthrown by the results of Lord Wellesley's resignation. The regent desired that Grey and Grenville should again be invited to join the Ministry, and with the assent of the Prime Minister, he sent his brother, the Duke of York, to open negotiations with them. They declined, as they needs must, when they found that the

regent objected as strongly as his father to the question of Catholic emancipation being brought forward, though their refusal was ostensibly based on the allegation that they differed from the administration they were invited to join on almost every political subject. A few months later Perceval was assassinated in the House of Commons. A period of confusion and *interregnum* ensued, in the course of which overtures were again made to Grenville and Grey, as well as to other of the Whig leaders. The Whigs still declined to form an alliance with Lord Liverpool, now the recognised chief of the Tory party, and they were unable to form a Government of their own. Accordingly, after an unsuccessful attempt of Lord Wellesley to form a Government on the basis of concession to the Catholic claims, Lord Liverpool became Prime Minister and Castlereagh leader of the House of Commons. Canning was invited to join the Government, and Castlereagh handsomely offered to relinquish the Foreign Office in order that Canning might take it, and to take the Chancellorship of the Exchequer. But Canning, who, whatever might be his own disposition, was not allowed by his friends to forget his former quarrel with Castlereagh, now chafed at the precedence accorded to his rival, and declined to take any office unless it were combined with the leadership of the House of Commons. On this point Lord Liverpool stood firm and Canning proved intractable. His ill-advised obstinacy excluded him from office until 1816, when he became President of the Board of Control, and was content to serve under Castlereagh until shortly before the latter's death in 1822. Had he joined Lord Liverpool it is probable that the Chief Secretaryship for Ireland would have

been offered to one of his personal adherents. His refusal left Lord Liverpool free to choose for himself among the younger members of his party, and after offering the post to Lord Palmerston, who declined it and resumed his former office of Secretary at War, he gave it to Peel. "I can speak with more confidence of Mr. Peel," wrote Liverpool to the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Richmond, on 1st August 1812, "than I could of most persons to whom such an office might be offered. He has been under me in the Secretary of State's office for two years, and has acquired all the necessary habits of official business. He has a particularly good temper and great frankness and openness of manners, which I know are particularly desirable on your side of the water. He acquired great reputation, as you must have heard, as a scholar at Oxford, and he has distinguished himself in the House of Commons on every occasion on which he has had an opportunity of speaking. I have the greatest hopes, therefore, that this appointment will prove acceptable to you and advantageous to the Government."

Peel remained Chief Secretary for Ireland for six years. He held office under three successive Lords Lieutenant—the Duke of Richmond, Lord Whitworth, and Lord Talbot—and when he resigned in the summer of 1818, he had so established his reputation in Parliament and among his political friends that he was already spoken of as the future Prime Minister. He was not advanced to the Cabinet, however, until he rejoined Lord Liverpool's Government as Home Secretary in 1821; but in July 1818, shortly before he resigned the Irish Secretaryship, his friend Croker wrote to him as follows:

"I must now mention to you more seriously (because it has been mentioned more seriously to me) what I have heretofore touched lightly upon, namely, your taking office. I do assure you upon my honour that I have never begun any conversation on the subject, but that in those companies where I have been, composed of very different classes of society, your acceptance of Van's office,"—Vansittart was Chancellor of the Exchequer—"and your ultimate advancement to the highest of all have been wished for warmly and unanimously."

Nevertheless the details of Peel's tenure of the office of Chief Secretary do not belong to the history of his statesmanship. This was the period of his political apprenticeship. In those days the office of Chief Secretary was administrative rather than parliamentary. The Irish Parliament had been incorporated with the Parliament of the United Kingdom, but the representatives of the Irish people were not there. The Catholic claims were advocated in Parliament not by representatives of the Irish people—for no Catholic could sit in the House of Commons, and the peasantry voted at the bidding of their landlords—but by Englishmen and the leaders of English parties. The House of Commons paid little heed to the social and economical condition of Ireland; to the current business of administration in Ireland it paid no attention at all. The habit of daily parliamentary questioning, now grown to so mischievous an excess, was practically unknown in the unreformed House of Commons, though its place was occasionally supplied by debates on the presentation of petitions. Accordingly, except when large questions of policy had to be debated or necessary measures of administration had to be intro-

duced and explained, Peel was not called upon to take any active part in the business of the House of Commons. In Ireland his appointment caused some surprise, and among the Catholics no little indignation. The Duke of Richmond, the Lord Lieutenant, had made himself notorious for his anti-Catholic sentiments and his eager sympathies with the Orange party. Peel was speedily identified with his policy and predilections, and gave no further signs of that openness of mind with regard to the future treatment of the Catholic question which he had displayed in his speech on the subject at the opening of the session of 1812. He, accordingly, soon got the nickname of "Orange Peel." This was probably undeserved. Peel was no bigot. His opposition to the Catholic claims was based on political grounds and not on religious animosity. Had a Government favourable to Catholic emancipation been formed by an alliance of the Whigs with the more liberal-minded colleagues of Perceval, it is doubtful whether Peel would have declined to join it or have taken up that attitude of uncompromising resistance to the Catholic claims which was forced upon him by the political circumstances of the time. His was a mind at all times open to the teaching of circumstance, and to the influence of other minds more liberal and less cautious in initiative than his own. It was his misfortune that he was hurried into office at a time when his political intelligence was only just beginning to expand. It was even a greater misfortune that the office he held compelled him to take a definite line on a question which had either divided or destroyed every Government since the beginning of the century.

No one, indeed, can justly blame Peel for thinking in 1812, after the death of Perceval and the restoration of the Tory party to power, that the Catholic claims must be strenuously resisted. The regent was hostile, the Whigs were powerless, the country was less liberal than the Whigs, war was raging on one continent and about to break out in another. It is true that before the end of the session Canning had carried a resolution in favour of the Catholic claims in the House of Commons, and a similar resolution moved by Lord Wellesley in the House of Lords was only rejected by a single vote. But this was a matter for the Cabinet to consider, not for a subordinate minister. An abstract resolution could not settle the question, and the Catholics themselves were divided on the details of the measure to be proposed. What Peel had to do, therefore, was to govern Ireland on the assumption that the Catholic claims could not be practically entertained. This he did with industry, energy, and such success as is compatible with an alien and vicious system.

In order to understand what Ireland was, and how it was governed in those days, we must get rid entirely of the ideas and associations engendered by the experience of the past sixty years. Until the Catholics were emancipated, there was no Irish party in the House of Commons. The representation was entirely in the hands of the dominant class, the Protestant landowners, and if this class alone be considered, the Act of Union might be pronounced an unqualified success. But the Irish people at large were entirely excluded from the promises and benefits of the Union. They were estranged more than ever from those who should have

been their natural leaders. The Protestant landowners lost such Irish sympathies as they once possessed, and absorbed English prejudices without being able to assimilate that kindly spirit of neighbourliness and social solidarity which has grown out of feudal relations and become the saving virtue of the English aristocracy. The Irish people, on the other hand, had nothing to do with the laws except to obey them; the laws were made in a Parliament in which they were not represented, and in which their grievances were never heard. Peel of course was in no way responsible for this state of things. He had to take it as he found it, and to make the best of it. The policy of the Government made it necessary to discountenance the advocates of the Catholic claims. To frown upon the Catholics was to smile upon the Protestants, to encourage the party of ascendency, and to give the rein to Orange faction. Hence it was that the Chief Secretary acquired the nickname of "Orange Peel." O'Connell attacked him of course. O'Connell's forte was vituperation. He was engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the elementary liberties of his countrymen, he was denounced as a demagogue and a firebrand, and he was not the man to pick his words in reply. The quarrel became so acute that at last O'Connell provoked Peel to send him a challenge. The duel never took place, as O'Connell was arrested first in Dublin and afterwards in London, and was forbidden to quit the country; but it led to an encounter between the seconds.

Peel's chief measures for Ireland included several Coercion Acts—Coercion Acts were passed and renewed with ease in those days—an attempt to improve the

system of education, and an Act passed in 1814 to extend throughout Ireland the improved system of police established in Dublin by Wellington, when as Sir Arthur Wellesley he held the post of Chief Secretary early in the century. This was the origin of the force now styled the Royal Irish Constabulary. The popular humour of Ireland at once attached the name of the Chief Secretary to the force he had created. Its members were hailed as "bobby" and "peeler," and these names, which still survive in the talk of the streets, were transferred to England when Peel as Home Secretary reorganised the metropolitan police in 1829. In Parliament, apart from the necessary business connected with the executive and administrative duties of his office, Peel's voice was chiefly heard on the subject of Catholic emancipation. Year by year the matter was debated, and year by year the Government maintained its position. The Catholic party was divided on what was known as the question of the veto—the question, that is, whether, if the Catholic claims were granted, the Government should obtain securities in the form, amongst others, of a veto on the appointment of Irish bishops. Grattan was favourable to the veto, O'Connell was bitterly opposed to it, and hence arose confusion and indecision in the ranks of the Catholics. Peel, however, based his opposition on grounds independent of the veto. Of the several speeches which he delivered on the subject at this period of his career, he has himself singled out that of 9th May 1817 as most fully developing and expressing his views. Of this speech Mackintosh wrote in his diary: "Peel made a speech of little merit, but elegantly and clearly expressed, and so

well delivered as to be applauded to excess. He is a proof of the great value of the mechanical parts of speaking, when combined with industry and education. He now fills the too important place of spokesman of the intolerant faction."

This judgment is too severe if it is held to impute intolerance to Peel himself. "My opposition was limited," he says in his *Memoirs*, "and it was uniformly declared by me to be limited to the walls of Parliament. I never attempted to control the free discretion of Parliament, on a question demanding the exercise of the calmest judgment, by external appeals to passions and prejudices easily excited on religious subjects, and especially on that subject." This is perfectly true, and justice to Peel requires that its truth should be fully acknowledged. But Mackintosh's language was prophetic. In the course of this same year the Speaker, Abbot, who represented the University of Oxford, was raised to the peerage as Lord Colchester, and vacated his seat for the University. With a passionate longing Canning had coveted this seat as the prize of his political career. He was the first orator in the House of Commons, one of the first statesmen in the land. But Canning was unsound on Catholic emancipation, and in other respects his political orthodoxy was more than suspect. Oxford would have none of him. At the bidding of Lord Eldon and his brother Sir William Scott, afterwards Lord Stowell, who then ruled the University in political matters, Peel was chosen without a contest—the "too important spokesman of an intolerant faction." He had relinquished his seat for Cashel at the general election of 1812, and had been returned for Chippenham. How and

why he relinquished his seat for the University we shall see hereafter—

> Turno tempus erit magno quum optaverit emptum
> Intactum Pallanta et quum spolia ista diemque
> Oderit.

In the summer of 1818 Peel resigned the office of Irish Secretary. He was weary of the work, which, except for the insight it gave him into the methods of administration, had no special attractions for him; he was not fond of Irish society, and probably he thought that the time had come when he had earned promotion. He gave no explanation in Parliament of the reasons for his resignation, but simply dropped quietly out of the ranks of the administration and became a private member. Rather more than three years later he entered the Cabinet in 1821 as Home Secretary on the retirement of Lord Sidmouth, and at once assumed a position in the House of Commons only inferior to that of Castlereagh and Canning. It may be that, though identified with a reactionary and repressive policy in Ireland, he had already begun to entertain those more liberal views of general policy which he propounded to Croker in 1820. His return to the Ministry coincided with the retirement of Lord Sidmouth, the minister responsible for the Six Acts, and with the alliance between the Government and the followers of Grenville. Nevertheless his retirement in 1818 remains one of the unsolved problems of modern political history, and is a signal illustration of that imperceptible change in constitutional practice whereby nowadays it would be impossible for an important minister daily advancing in

public esteem and parliamentary reputation to withdraw from office without explaining the grounds on which he acted.

We have seen that Peel recommended himself to Lord Liverpool by his "particularly good temper and great frankness and openness of manners." It is difficult to recognise the Peel of later days in this description. In the opinion of those who knew him best Peel's temper was not naturally good, though, by the testimony of all, he learnt to keep it under almost preternatural control. He was intensely sensitive to pain, both mental and bodily, and the agony caused by the fatal accident which ended his life was so acute that his medical attendants were unable to ascertain the full extent of the injuries he had sustained. His passionate temper, though habitually restrained, would, on extreme provocation, break out with such violence that for the moment he was almost beside himself. It is certain that during the acrimonious debates on the Corn Laws in 1846, when he was rancorously pursued by the leaders of the party which felt itself betrayed by him, he was so provoked on one occasion that he desired to send a challenge to his assailant, though a controversy has arisen as to whether this was Disraeli or Lord George Bentinck. It is true that Wellington had fought with Lord Winchelsea when he was Prime Minister in 1829; but even then public opinion had been gravely shocked by the occurrence, and by 1846 the practice of duelling had falling into complete disrepute. In his calmer moments Peel must have known that the head of a Ministry which had, in 1844, deliberately forbidden officers in the Queen's service to fight a duel under

penalty of being cashiered, could not himself fight a duel and remain a minister of the Crown. He was even unduly sensitive to less envenomed and less serious attacks. On 16th May 1833 Cobbett moved a grotesque series of resolutions condemning the policy of the Currency Act of 1819, for which Peel was responsible, and ending with a motion for an address to the king praying him to dismiss Peel from the Privy Council. The House was inclined to treat the whole affair as a sorry joke. But Peel replied to the attack in an elaborate and impassioned speech. A man of ordinary parliamentary temper would have treated such an attack with the contempt it deserved. But Peel was not a man of ordinary parliamentary temper. He was jealous of his personal dignity, and he was so self-conscious as to be almost egotistical. His own personality always occupied an area unduly large in the range of his mental vision. He went out of his way on this occasion to reproach Cobbett with having called his father "a cotton-weaver," and he spoke of his obscurity of origin in language which showed that he was not indifferent to the taunt. But this was not all. Practised debater as he was, immeasurably superior to Cobbett in political character, in parliamentary standing, and in public estimation, the speech cost him a great effort. So deeply was he moved, so vehemently did he exert himself, that as he spoke the high collars which men wore in those days gradually became saturated with perspiration and fell back in limp disarray, betraying to all who saw him the intensity of his agitation.[1]

[1] The writer had this anecdote of the collars from Mr. Gladstone,

Peel's manners also underwent a change from the openness and frankness which Lord Liverpool attributed to him, to a shyness and awkward reserve which strangers mistook for haughtiness and his enemies for excessive craft. This change was probably due to his early experience in Ireland. He was not naturally of a sociable or expansive temperament, and the example of the Duke of Richmond, who made himself the boon companion of Orangemen and of the leaders of the ascendency party, probably acted as a warning to him. He devoted himself to the business of his office and cultivated a reserve of manner which never afterwards left him. His awkward manners became, in fact, proverbial. In the privacy of his family and in the society of a few intimates—he never at any time mixed largely in general society—he could be genial, sprightly, unaffected, and even indiscreet. But in official intercourse, and in his public and parliamentary appearances, he was self-conscious, ill at ease, difficult of approach, impenetrable, and ungenial. "Peel is a bad horse to go up to in the stable," said Melbourne of him on a memorable occasion, when Lord John Russell found it necessary to consult him about the re-election of the Speaker, and met with a chilling repulse. "I have no small talk, and Peel has no manners," said Wellington in describing the difficulties which a Tory Ministry was likely to meet with at the court of a young Queen. He himself was wont to lament his unfortunate manner. O'Connell, who hated him, not altogether without reason, and never spared his enemies,

to whom he is further indebted for many valuable suggestions. But Mr. Gladstone is in no way responsible for the incidental comments, which are, of course, exclusively the writer's own.

is commonly believed to have said that his smile was like the silver plate on a coffin, though the phrase is applied in one of O'Connell's speeches to Stanley. *Il ne se déboutonna jamais*, said Guizot, who knew him well, and respected him greatly. Charles Greville described his demeanour at court as that of a dancing master instructing his pupils. This was the man whose good temper and frank and open manners had recommended him to Lord Liverpool as one specially likely to make a popular Irish Secretary.

CHAPTER III

THE CURRENCY AND THE CRIMINAL LAW

1819–1827

PEEL relinquished the Irish Secretaryship with an undisguised sense of relief. He was not long to enjoy his freedom, however. He went to Scotland with a party of friends and enjoyed sport in the Highlands in a fashion rare then, though common enough since, and he projected a continental tour in the winter. But no sooner did Parliament meet in 1819 than he found himself again immersed in public duties. A committee was appointed by the House of Commons to consider the question of the resumption of cash payments, and Peel was nominated by the Government to be a member of this committee. He was not known at this time to have devoted any special attention to financial questions, and it is possible that his selection by the Government was due to the fact that he had voted against the resumption of cash payments proposed by Horner in 1811, and that his father was well known to be one of those who regarded an inconvertible paper currency as a mainstay of national prosperity. But Peel was now to show that he possessed

an eminently open and teachable mind, and that when his reason was once thoroughly convinced neither filial respect nor political consistency nor party prepossession could prevent his taking the course which he thought conducive to the public welfare. He was chosen by the committee as its chairman, and the Bill for the Resumption of Cash Payments, which was based on its report, was introduced by him and carried almost without opposition in the House of Commons.

Before 1797 the currency had consisted either of coin or of bank-notes payable on demand in coin. These notes were issued both by the Bank of England and by other banks in the country which had acquired the right of issue. In other words, the currency consisted of cash and of notes strictly interchangeable with cash. The convertibility of the notes compelled the Bank of England and all other banks of issue to keep a reserve of cash, in the form either of gold or of bullion, sufficient to meet the anticipated demands of their customers. If at any time the demand exceeded the supply the banks became insolvent; but though this catastrophe might happen to ordinary banks of issue which had nothing but their own credit to depend upon, it could hardly happen to the Bank of England, because its relations with the Government were such that the credit of the two was practically inseparable, and the legislative power of the Government might always be trusted to come to the rescue of the bank. Nevertheless the association of the bank with the Government was not an unmixed advantage to the former, nor a benefit to the country at large. The Government might make use of the credit of the bank, and even of its reserves of cash, and then fall

back upon its legislative power to preserve the bank from insolvency. The bank in that case might be the gainer in the end, but the country at large would be the sufferer in the loss, disturbance, and confusion that ensued. This is what happened in 1797, when cash payments were suspended. The costs of the war had been enormous, alike in the maintenance of troops and armaments and in the lavish subsidies which England bestowed on her allies. To meet this excessive expenditure, which could only be liquidated in specie, the Government borrowed largely from the bank, and then found itself unable to repay the advances. Matters came to a crisis at the beginning of 1797, when Pitt asked for a fresh advance from the bank at a time when the fear of imminent invasion had caused a general panic and stimulated the demand for specie. The directors had to tell him that they must either refuse his application or disappoint their private creditors—become insolvent, in fact. On Saturday the 25th February it was found that there was little more than a million in the bank in cash and bullion to meet a severe run which was expected on the Monday morning. Accordingly a council was held on the Sunday, and an order was issued forbidding the bank to give cash for its notes until Parliament had been consulted. The House of Commons immediately appointed a secret committee to take the matter into consideration, and in the end a Bill was introduced, subsequently known as the Bank Restriction Act, forbidding the bank to resume cash payments until six months had elapsed after the conclusion of a definitive treaty of peace. The measure was passed almost without opposition.

In its essence the Bank Restriction Act 1797 was the substitution of an inconvertible for a convertible paper currency. The effect of this is to establish a variable and usually a decreasing ratio between the nominal and real value of the current medium of exchange. So long as notes issued by a bank are convertible on demand into bullion or cash they represent exactly their nominal value in terms of the precious metal. They cannot be issued in excess, because any superfluous notes are immediately returned to the bank, and cash is taken in exchange for them. But the moment the paper is rendered inconvertible not only is the temptation to issue it in excess almost irresistible, but there exists no machinery capable of restraining its issue in excess. The effect of issuing inconvertible paper in excess is thus exactly the same as that of debasing the current coinage of a country. In both cases the nominal value of the currency, whether coin or paper, becomes greater than the real value, so that a larger amount of the depreciated currency is now required to purchase a given quantity of gold than before. The results are seen in a rise in the market price of gold, and a fall in the foreign exchanges, and often in a general rise in all prices.

Such are the general effects of the substitution of an inconvertible for a convertible paper currency. It commits to a body of fallible and irresponsible men,—none of them necessarily acquainted with the very delicate and abstruse laws which govern the operations of currency, and all of them more or less interested in interfering with those laws to their own real or supposed advantage,—the important charge of supply-

ing the country with that quantity of circulating medium which is exactly proportioned to the wants and occasions of the public. So long as the circulating medium is either coin of an ascertained and certified standard of fineness, or paper convertible into such coin at will, this proportion is regulated automatically. An excess of the circulating medium corrects itself at once usually by the exportation of bullion in exchange for commodities attracted by the rise in price due to a temporary excess of gold. But no such automatic adjustment is possible where the circulating medium is inconvertible paper. An expansion of trade may absorb the excess for a time, and then the evil is deferred. But the moment the price of gold, expressed in terms of the inconvertible paper, rises above the mint price, the excess declares itself, and being now incapable of automatic reduction by exportation or otherwise, the consequences are forthwith felt in a rise of prices relatively to other countries. Even this would be an evil which would correct itself in time if the rise were permanent and determinate. But no sooner is the currency tampered with, no sooner, to borrow the expressive phraseology of American finance, is "soft" money substituted for "hard" money, than the ratio of the nominal to the real value of the circulating medium becomes liable to incessant fluctuation, in obedience to a multitude of extraneous and uncontrollable influences. At one time it sinks to par, while at another it rises to a heavy premium, with the inevitable result of uncertainty and confusion in all business transactions.

For some time after the passing of the Bank Restric-

tion Act the change excited no great attention. The market price of gold, expressed in terms of the inconvertible paper, rose considerably up to 1800, and its rise caused some alarm, and originated the controversy which Peel finally set at rest in 1819. But from 1801 to 1808 there was no appreciable difference between the value of gold and the value of bank paper, while such difference as there was seems to have been due less to an excess of the paper than to the readiness of the bank to give £4 an ounce for all the gold that might be offered. Towards the close of 1808 the price of gold began to rise very rapidly, fluctuating from £4 : 9s. to £4 : 12s. per ounce, or more than 15 per cent above the mint price.[1] Much excitement was caused by this state of affairs, an active controversy was again waged between the advocates of "soft" and "hard" money, and in the session of 1810 Francis Horner, a political adherent of Lord Grenville, a scientific economist, and one of the founders of the *Edinburgh Review*, to an early number of which he had contributed a memorable article on the currency, moved for a committee "to inquire into the cause of the high price of gold bullion, and to take into consideration the state of the circulating medium, and of the exchanges

[1] The so-called mint price of gold, £3 : 17 : 10½ per ounce, is the rate at which the mint is required by its indentures to produce sovereigns. It is not a statement of the market value of gold, but a definition of the legal weight and fineness of the sovereign, and thus it becomes a convenient standard of reference. The difference between the mint price of gold and its market price, expressed in the terms of a depreciated currency, is thus the exact measure of the depreciation; and in the case of the issue of inconvertible paper it is frequently a good measure of the extent to which that paper has been issued in excess.

between Great Britain and foreign parts." This was the celebrated Bullion Committee, and the publication of its report, one of the most important and impressive documents ever submitted to Parliament, marks a critical epoch in the modern history of the national currency. Horner was chosen chairman of the committee, and though Perceval, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, was a member of the committee, and, like the bulk of the Tory party, was favourable to the maintenance of the Bank Restriction Act, the committee reported in favour of the resumption of cash payments to be completed in the course of two years.

In the course of the following session Horner moved a series of resolutions designed to give effect to the recommendations of the Bullion Committee. He introduced his resolutions in a masterly speech, which established once for all his financial reputation, and has given him an honourable place in the history of his country; but he failed to convince the House of Commons. He was opposed by Vansittart, who was at that time a private member and an adherent of Lord Sidmouth, but who next year became Chancellor of the Exchequer after the death of Perceval, and introduced in that capacity more budgets than any Chancellor of the Exchequer of the present century, except Mr. Gladstone, and probably worse budgets than all other Chancellors of the Exchequer put together.

Vansittart, in the course of his speech, invited the House "to pledge itself to the belief that bank-notes still are, as they always have been, equivalent to legal coin for the internal purposes of the country,

the only purposes to which they have been applicable." The weight of argument was unquestionably with Horner and his supporters, among whom Canning, always liberal in his impulses though Tory in his party connections, was conspicuous. But the weight of a parliamentary majority was with Vansittart. The market price of gold, expressed in terms of the bank paper, was £4 : 10s.—that is, it required £4 : 10s. of the paper to purchase an ounce of gold which the mint would only coin into sovereigns at the rate of £3 : 17 : 10½ per ounce. Yet Vansittart succeeded in persuading the House of Commons to declare that the bank-note was equivalent to the bullion. Peel voted with Vansittart. He is not, perhaps, to be greatly blamed for his vote. He was a young man who had been taught by his father to reverence the genius, the policy, and the finance of Pitt. His father carried to the grave the conviction that the Bank Restriction Act had saved England from becoming a French province. His vote was simply a vote in accordance with the principles in which he had been nurtured, and in support of a Ministry of which he was a subordinate member. The alternative to Vansittart's resolutions was a resumption of cash payments in accordance with the recommendations of the Bullion Committee. The reasoning of Horner might be unanswerable in the abstract, but its practical application to the circumstances of the time was open to dispute. In 1819, when he introduced the resolutions on which the measure for the resumption of cash payments was founded, Peel declared that though he had fully adopted Horner's principles as laid down in 1811, "he should probably even now vote, if it were again brought before

the House, in opposition to the practical measure then recommended." If any justification of his action were required it might be found in the impartial judgment of Tooke, the historian of prices. "Taking a calm and impartial view," writes Tooke, "of the circumstances of those times, I cannot but think that the Government and the House of Commons were right in negativing the resolutions making it imperative on the bank to pay in gold at the end of two years."

The defeat of Horner's resolutions definitely postponed the resumption of cash payments until after the end of the war. When the time came, however, for the expiry of the Restriction Act, the Government proposed its further continuance until July 1818. The market price of gold fell rapidly during the two years which followed the re-establishment of peace, and the reserves of bullion in the bank increased to such an extent that the directors declared in the autumn of 1817 that they were prepared to pay in cash all notes bearing a date earlier than the beginning of that year. In 1818, however, a heavy demand for gold on the continent caused the market price of gold to rise once more to £4 : 3s. for a short time. The bank found itself in great straits, and the Government agreed to continue the Restriction Act for a year longer.

It was in these circumstances that the committee, over which Peel was chosen to preside, was appointed in 1819. It reported, somewhat unexpectedly perhaps, and very much to the dismay of the agricultural interests and of the anti-bullionists or advocates of "soft" money among the mercantile community, in favour of a resumption of cash payments to be gradually accomplished

by successive stages in the course of four years. The bank was to be repaid a sum of £10,000,000, which had been advanced to the Government. For eight months after 1st February 1820 it was to deliver bullion of standard fineness at the price of £4 : 1s. per ounce to all applicants for not less than sixty ounces; then at the price of £3 : 19 : 6 until 1st May 1821, and thenceforth at the rate of £3 : 17 : 10½ until 1st May 1823. After the latter date the bank was to pay its notes in the legal coin of the realm. As a matter of fact the bank was able to reach this final condition as early as 1st May 1821, which is the memorable date of the resumption of cash payments in England.

This was Peel's first great financial achievement. The Act embodying the recommendations of the committee generally went by his name, and he was called upon to defend it on more than one occasion during the next few years. No serious attempt has ever been made to repeal it or materially to modify its provisions. It re-established once for all a single uniform metallic standard for the national currency, and it avoided—deliberately and not merely by accident—the pitfalls of a bimetallic standard. Its principles are now so firmly established, and the country is so accustomed to their results, that it is difficult in the present day to realise the full significance of the controversies which preceded its enactment, or the full extent of the evils and dangers which its enactment abated or averted. It caused some suffering to individuals who had to discharge debts in a currency worth 20s. which had been contracted in a currency worth perhaps only 15s.; but this individual suffering was more than balanced by

the advantage of the community at large. If, as Peel said in his speech, one of the noblest titles of Elizabeth to the recognition of posterity is that recorded on her monument in the words "*Moneta in justum valorem reducta*," that title must also be accorded in no scanty measure to Peel himself.

It has been made a reproach to Peel, by one who never spared him in life, though after his death he strove not ungenerously to do him fuller justice, that he was constantly liable to conversions of this kind. Peel, it was said by this implacable assailant, was the "great parliamentary middleman"; his mind was a "huge appropriation clause"; and even in the milder estimate which Disraeli gave in his *Lord George Bentinck*, he says: "There was always some person representing some theory or system exercising an influence over his mind: In his 'sallet days' it was Mr. Horner or Sir Samuel Romilly; in later and more important periods it was the Duke of Wellington, the King of the French, Mr. Jones Loyd, some others, and finally Mr. Cobden." In reality this openness of mind, this readiness to follow mature and honest conviction whithersoever it might lead him, is Peel's shining merit as a statesman. His conversions were not determined by personal interest, by narrow views of political expediency, by cunningly laid schemes of party strategy. They were the slow, reasoned, sincere, and inevitable results of patient and painful reflection on the truth of things and its relation to the national welfare. At any rate Peel's measures have stood the test of time; they are indelibly stamped on the constitution and polity of his country. There were, no doubt, incidents in his career which puzzled

his contemporaries and may still perplex the historian. But without prejudging these matters we may say at once that to have learnt the principles of currency and finance from Ricardo, Horner, and Huskisson, the principles of criminal legislation from Romilly and Mackintosh, and the principles of free trade from Villiers and Cobden, was not Peel's reproach but his everlasting honour.

Peel remained out of office for two years longer. He gave a general support to the Government, though, as we have seen, he gradually acquired the conviction that its policy was less liberal than the feelings and needs of the country required. The times were manifestly out of joint. The period between the close of the war and the death of Castlereagh in 1822 is one of the most disastrous in the modern history of England. The Ministry were strong in the prestige acquired by a war triumphantly waged and a peace honourably concluded, but their title on any other ground to the confidence and respect of their countrymen was slender. They could not understand that methods of government which are tolerated during a prolonged struggle for national existence become intolerable as soon as the stress of the conflict is relaxed. They did not perceive that new ideas were striving for expression in the national life, that new classes had risen to importance in the State, that the nation which in the last century had been transformed from an agricultural into a commercial community had emerged from the war the first commercial community in the world. Such changes are not in any case effected without disturbance, perplexity, and distress. When they are

effected in the midst of and partly by means of war, the return of peace necessarily aggravates all the elements of disturbance. Hence the popular distress accompanied by popular violence which marked the period between 1815 and 1822. The statesmanship of the time was represented by the stern toryism of Eldon, the repressive legislation of Sidmouth, and the feeble finance of Vansittart. Its results were seen in such manifestations of national perplexity and discontent as the Luddite riots, the march of the Blanketeers, the tragedy of Peterloo, and the Cato Street conspiracy.

Peel, though he supported the Government and defended the conduct of the Manchester magistrates in 1819, was in no hurry to resume office. He was content to bide his time and to await the development of events. In 1820 he was married to Julia, youngest daughter of General Sir John Floyd, a distinguished Indian officer. His marriage was a thoroughly happy one. Lady Peel, who was no politician—the phrase is her own in a letter written to a friend in 1846 and now preserved in the British Museum—nevertheless became her husband's most intimate confidant in all public affairs. He was reserved with others, he had few intimate friends, and fewer social ambitions. He was never reserved with her, and he found in domestic happiness, in the love of his wife and the promise of his children, that consolation for the toils, trials, and disappointments of public life which public men often seek in a brilliant social position, in troops of admiring friends, even in the sycophancy of designing associates.

There seem to have been several circumstances apart from his marriage which kept Peel aloof from the

Ministry at this period of his career. He was mistrustful of his health, and he was perhaps still more doubtful of the stability of the Government. George III had died in the beginning of 1820, and the scandals which culminated in the trial of Queen Caroline, the unhappy consort of George IV, might well make a statesman who respected himself and believed in his future reluctant to join a Government which was brought to the verge of dissolution by the ineptitude of its policy and its parliamentary discredit. At the very end of 1821, however, a place was at last found for Peel. Canning had already left the Ministry, unable to agree with his colleagues on the conduct of the Queen's trial, and perhaps this circumstance may have rendered it more easy for Peel to return to office. Between these two statesmen—one of whom might have expected to be Prime Minister more than ten years ago, while the other had never yet held Cabinet office—there had grown up a sort of undeclared and unacknowledged rivalry. This antagonism, which did no discredit to either, for it was honourably restrained by both, and existed rather in the minds of others than in their own, was accentuated by the selection of Peel in preference to Canning as member for the University of Oxford in 1817. They were sharply opposed on the great question of the time, that of Catholic emancipation, and each may have foreseen from the outset that this fundamental difference must ultimately lead, as it actually did, to a rupture between them whenever the lapse of time should bring them both to the front rank in the House of Commons. When men are thus situated towards each other, it is not unnatural that the presence of one of them in the

Cabinet should enhance the reluctance of the other to enter it.

However this may be, the retirement of Canning in 1821 seems to have led Lord Liverpool to think that Peel might not be unwilling to replace him. Negotiations of a somewhat vague character took place, in which in the first instance no definite offer was made. Peel was in any case determined not to accept the Presidency of the Board of Control, the office vacated by Canning, and when Lord Liverpool, finding that vague negotiations were of no avail with a man of Peel's difficult temper, definitely offered him the post, Peel definitely declined it. But towards the end of the year, when the Ministry seemed to be on the verge of dissolution, an alliance was effected with the parliamentary followers of Lord Grenville, and among the changes which followed Lord Sidmouth resigned the office of Home Secretary, though he still remained a member of the Cabinet, and his place was offered to and accepted by Peel.

Peel thus stepped at once into the second place in the House of Commons. Castlereagh, now Lord Londonderry, still remained the leader of the House, and Canning was still excluded from office by the animosity of the king. In August 1822, shortly after the close of the session, Castlereagh destroyed himself. His untimely and unexpected death led directly to momentous changes in the structure and policy of Lord Liverpool's Government. The king was in Scotland when Castlereagh died, and Canning, who had accepted the post of Governor-General of India, was preparing to leave England. The king wrote at once to Lord Liverpool to announce his desire that the arrangements made

respecting India—that is, Canning's appointment—should "remain final and irrevocable." He then told Peel, who was attending him as minister, what he had done, and expressed a hope that Peel would think he had done right. Peel with characteristic caution desired to be excused from giving any opinion on the subject. In point of fact Canning was indispensable to the Government, and after much negotiation, necessary to overcome the king's animosity and to readjust the equilibrium of the Cabinet, Canning was appointed to succeed Castlereagh at the Foreign Office, and to take his place as leader of the House of Commons. At the same time Robinson, afterwards Lord Goderich, became Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Huskisson was promoted to the Presidency of the Board of Trade with a promise of ultimate admission to the Cabinet.

This reconstruction of the Liverpool Cabinet, whereby Canning became leader of the House of Commons and virtual head of the Government, marks a turning-point in the history of the country. It is the first public and parliamentary recognition of the steady rise of that liberal tide which reached its flood in 1830. Peel, in the letter to Croker already quoted, protested against the use of the word "liberal" in this connection. But the protest is unavailing. The word had not in those days become a party badge, and no other word so well expresses the change which came over the spirit of Lord Liverpool's Government when Canning assumed his rightful place as its leading member. The days of Eldonism were over. Castlereagh, Sidmouth, and Vansittart were gone. Their places were taken by Canning, Peel, Huskisson, and Robinson—for Huskisson, by far

the stronger and the abler man, a master of scientific finance whose influence even on Peel himself has been insufficiently appreciated, was really responsible for all that was good in the financial policy of Robinson. Canning recast the foreign policy of the country; Huskisson and Robinson reconstructed its finance; Peel administered its internal affairs with industry, judgment, and true liberality of spirit, and gave effect in legislation to the humane principles for which Romilly and Mackintosh had so long contended in vain.

"Among the grievances which formed the subject of remonstrance and complaint, both in Parliament and out of doors, nothing was more anomalous, more unfortunate, and more indefensible than the criminal code which disgraced the Statute-book. During the earlier years of the present century the punishment of death could legally be inflicted for more than 200 offences."[1] This was the state of the law which Romilly early in the century set himself to alter. He met with indifferent success. At first the House of Commons would hardly listen to him, and such of his measures as the House of Commons spared the House of Lords destroyed. The efforts of three years, 1808-11, only resulted in the abolition of capital punishment for picking pockets and stealing goods from bleaching-grounds. Romilly continued his humane efforts for the reform of the criminal law until his death, which occurred by his own hand in 1818, and thenceforward his work was carried on under better auspices by Mackintosh. Romilly had effected little but his example and his devotion to the cause of humanity had quickened public opinion, had enlisted the

[1] Walpole, *History of England*, vol. ii. p. 59.

Whigs on his side, and had even made some impression on the Tory majority in Parliament. Mackintosh moved in 1819 for a committee to consider so much of the criminal law as related to capital punishment. Castlereagh endeavoured to smother this motion by extending the terms of reference to the whole criminal code, but Mackintosh stood his ground, and his motion was carried against the Government.

The committee thus appointed reported in favour of the unconditional repeal of the statutes imposing capital punishment on acts which were either innocuous or which were capable of punishment as misdemeanours at common law. It also recommended the substitution of milder penalties than that of death for a variety of grave offences, and suggested that the laws relating to forgery should be methodised and reformed. The suspension of cash payments had given exceptional importance to the crime of forgery. Before 1797, said Mackintosh in a speech in the House of Commons in 1818, "forgery of bank-notes was the rarest of all criminal cases. In the last seven years not less than 101 persons had suffered death for this crime. Executions for forgery now stood at the head of the list of capital punishments; they were far more numerous than executions for murder or for burglary; they were double all the executions for robbery, and much greater than all executions for all other offences taken together." Apart from their direct reference, these words are a significant illustration of the severity of the criminal law in those days.

In the following session Mackintosh introduced six Bills for the purpose of giving effect to the recommenda-

tions of the committee of 1819. Three were passed, with some modifications introduced by Eldon, and three were rejected. The rejected Bills were introduced again in 1821, when two were passed in the House of Commons and rejected in the House of Lords. The third related to the offence of forgery, and after an active controversy, in the course of which Mackintosh weakly and inconsistently consented to retain the capital penalty for forgery on the Bank of England, the Bill was rejected on the third reading by a narrow majority.

In the session of 1823, when Peel had succeeded Lord Sidmouth at the Home Office and the influence of Canning had profoundly modified the spirit of Lord Liverpool's Government, Mackintosh returned once more to the subject. He had in the previous session carried a resolution against the Government, pledging the House "to take into its serious consideration the means of increasing the efficacy of the criminal law by abating its undue rigour." In opposing this resolution, Peel had declared that Mackintosh would not in future find him a predetermined opponent. Accordingly in 1823 Mackintosh introduced a series of resolutions which were opposed in form, on behalf of the Government, by Peel, who carried the previous question, but were so far accepted in spirit that the Home Secretary undertook forthwith to introduce measures for the purpose of giving effect to such of Mackintosh's proposals as the Government could approve. He refused on this occasion to abate the penalty for forgery — though in 1830 he was ready to go a long way in that direction—but he introduced forthwith five statutes exempting from capital punishment about 100 felonies. These Bills

passed through both Houses without opposition. Even Eldon did not resist them, and they were not so much as debated in the House of Lords. These measures were followed up by Peel in subsequent sessions by a series of statutes of great importance and scope for the consolidation, amendment, and improvement of criminal law and procedure. Before he left office in 1827 nearly 300 Acts relating to the criminal law had been wholly or partially repealed, and such of their provisions as were still retained had been consolidated in eight new statutes. Sir James Mackintosh was content, after the gratifying experience of 1823, to leave the further reform of the criminal law in the willing and capable hands of Peel. He said in after years, when considering the reforms effected, "that he could almost think that he had lived in two different countries, and conversed with people who spoke two different languages." This change was mainly due to the statesmanship of Peel.

CHAPTER IV

CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION

1827–1829

THE early history of the struggle for Catholic emancipation does not concern this volume. It belongs to the general history of the time. The question had, as has been said, divided, weakened, or destroyed every Government which held office from the time of the Union until it was finally settled in 1829. Pitt had deliberately left the question of the admission of the Catholic subjects of the Crown to civil equality unsettled at the time of the Union. He had no choice in the matter. The face of the king was sternly set against Catholic emancipation. He regarded it as a violation of his coronation oath. The Government of Lord Grenville fell because it declined to give the king a pledge not to bring forward the question. Thenceforward, although no formal pledge was given, Governments were formed on the understanding that the question would not be mooted by them. The division of opinion on the matter, however, did not correspond with divisions of party. The Whigs were Catholic—to use the convenient but not very accurate phraseology of the time—

Catholic to a man. But not all Tories were Protestant. Perceval, Liverpool, Sidmouth, Eldon, and, generally speaking, the high Tories were Protestant. But Wellesley and Castlereagh in the Ministry of Perceval, Castlereagh, Canning, and others in the Ministry of Lord Liverpool were Catholic. George IV, both as regent and as king, adopted the opinions and attitude of his father, though in earlier days he had affected Catholic sympathies when he found it convenient to identify himself with the Opposition. The House of Lords was Protestant of course. On two occasions prior to 1829 a Bill for the emancipation of the Catholics was passed by the House of Commons and rejected by the House of Lords. In the House of Commons the Catholic cause steadily grew from about the year 1820 onwards. It was strengthened by the now acknowledged leadership of O'Connell in Ireland and by the influence in that country of the body known as the Catholic Association. Whether public opinion in England and Scotland was identical with that of the House of Commons is perhaps doubtful. Thoughtful politicians among the Whigs, and even many among the Tories, were, and always had been, favourable to the Catholic claims; but the bulk of the English electors were not very thoughtful in those days, and they were strongly imbued with Protestant sympathies and prejudices. Though the country was fast outgrowing the Toryism of Perceval and Liverpool, and would, if events had taken their normal course, have gradually become liberal in political sentiment and tendency with Canning and his followers, yet it is not impossible that if a general election had taken place in 1829 the Protestant prejudices

of the electors of Great Britain might have secured a majority hostile to the Catholic claims.

Thus the condition of the question at the time of Lord Liverpool's retirement in 1827 presented all those elements of anomaly, difficulty, and confusion, which, unless statesmanship were capable of dealing with them firmly, promptly, and sagaciously, might easily lead to revolution. The king was obstinate, and impervious to argument. The House of Lords was inexorably hostile to the Catholic claims; the House of Commons was favourable to them, but diffident of its hold on public opinion in relation to this particular question; the Ministry was hopelessly divided against itself. No Government, either wholly favourable or wholly unfavourable to the Catholic claims, could be formed; the Whigs had no majority and the Tories were not unanimous. Accordingly for many years the extraordinary principle was accepted that on the most vital question of the time—a question which went to the root of national polity—individual ministers were free to speak and vote according to their individual sentiments. The Government had no policy except to disagree; and, in truth, to treat Catholic emancipation as an open question was the negation of all policy, the abdication of all statesmanship, the canonisation of political infidelity. So long as Lord Liverpool lived and ruled, however, this strange system lasted. From 1823 to 1827 the extraordinary spectacle was presented of Canning advocating Catholic emancipation from his place as leader of the House of Commons, and being answered by Peel, the second man in the Ministry, from the same bench.

Peel, however, confined his opposition to the walls of Parliament. He never condescended to appeal to religious bigotry outside. His objections to Catholic emancipation were at least those of a statesman, and not those of a mere partisan. There was indeed a time in 1812 when he seemed for the moment to stand at the parting of the ways—when, if party combinations had so ordered it, he might have yielded to the Catholic claims, or might have acquiesced, without serious resistance, in the settlement of the question by his political opponents. But from the time of his election for the University of Oxford in 1817 his position was fixed once for all. Necessity might compel him to give way, as indeed it ultimately did, but to the force of argument he was thenceforth deaf. His treatment of the subject in Parliament was largely assisted by that convenient artifice of political logic which consists in fitting foregone conclusions with plausible premisses. He was never convinced, however, of the futility of his own arguments. He yielded, when he did yield, not to what Mr. Gladstone called in his memorable apology for his own political conversion, "the slow and resistless forces of conviction," but to the imperious force of political necessity. In Peel's political career there were three great surrenders—on the currency, on Catholic emancipation, and on the corn laws. But the circumstances of the first and last were altogether different from those of the second. In the case of the currency he fully adopted the principles, the reasoning, and the conclusions of Horner and the Bullion Committee. In the case of the corn laws his reason was finally convinced by the arguments of Villiers and Cobden and the other

parliamentary advocates of free trade. But in the case of Catholic emancipation he never adopted the arguments of his opponents. In his great speech on the introduction of the Catholic Relief Bill on 5th March 1829 he said: "According to my heart and conscience I believe that the time is come when less danger is to be apprehended to the general interests of the Empire, and to the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Protestant establishment, in attempting to adjust the Catholic question, than in allowing it to remain any longer in its present state. . . . I have for years attempted to maintain the exclusion of Roman Catholics from Parliament and the high offices of the State. I do not think it was an unnatural or unreasonable struggle. I resign it in consequence of the conviction that it can be no longer advantageously maintained, from believing that there are not adequate materials or sufficient instruments for its effectual and permanent continuance. I yield, therefore, to a moral necessity which I cannot control, unwilling to push resistance to a point which might endanger the establishments that I wish to defend." This is the language not of conviction but of surrender.

We have now to see how this surrender was brought about. Peel was fond of pointing out that of the five Parliaments elected between 1807 and 1829 four had at one time or another pronounced in favour of the adjustment of the Catholic question. The exception was the Parliament elected in 1818, which divided against the Catholic claims by a majority of only two. It is singular that the true bearing of this argument never occurred to Peel until he was compelled by necessity,

and not by reason, to admit it. Whatever might be the case with others, it was not open to him to contend that the opinion of Parliament was in advance of the opinion of the country. Such a contention could only have been practically enforced by a direct appeal to religious bigotry; and though such an appeal might have been successful even in 1829, Peel was too much of a statesman to think of making it. If the Catholic claims could not be resisted in Parliament, and resisted by arguments which, albeit now disallowed by time and circumstance, were not unworthy of a constitutional statesman, it was certain that Peel would never condescend to resist them by an appeal to Protestant fanaticism. It is probable, therefore, that long before 1828 he began to foresee, dimly at first and without consciously acknowledging his forecast even to himself, that the time would come when they could no longer be successfully resisted. Probably he thought that that movement of public opinion towards a more liberal order of ideas, which he detected in 1820, would lead by a natural evolution to the early triumph of the Whigs, and to the settlement by them of a question with which they had been so long and so honourably identified. In that case his course would have been clear. His position in the Tory party, and his relations with the University of Oxford, would, doubtless, have kept him steadfast on the side of resistance. But he would merely have offered a constitutional and parliamentary resistance, as the leader of an Opposition in a minority, and when the change had been effected he would have loyally acquiesced in it, and perhaps have secretly rejoiced that a difficulty which he was unable to surmount was finally removed from his path. His conduct

in 1827, when he separated from Canning, appears to have been determined by considerations of this kind.

But here we encounter the fundamental defect of Peel's character as a statesman. It is a defect to which, in a greater or less degree, all parliamentary statesmen are liable; and Peel, who was pronounced by no very friendly critic to have been "the greatest member of Parliament that ever lived," had it in excess. He had insight but not foresight. A parliamentary statesman is irresistibly impelled to deal only with such circumstances as compel his attention, with such questions as imperiously demand a settlement. All other questions are to him "outside the range of practical politics." They only come within that range when he is either compelled to deal with them by the force of circumstances or tempted to deal with them by the prospect of party advantage. To the latter motive, so far as it is inconsistent with honour, patriotism, and the public welfare, Peel was absolutely impervious—he was not the man to "dish the Whigs"; to the former he was very slow to yield. He lacked the crowning gift of statesmanship, the gift of prescience. All the things that happened in 1828 and made Catholic emancipation inevitable had been foretold by those who had advocated the Catholic claims in former years. All the signs of the times should have convinced him that the question was ripe, and even over-ripe, for settlement. But Peel declined to be moved by prophecy. The signs of the times had little meaning for him. He had little or no perception of ripeness in political issues other than that which was forced on him by the imperious teaching of circumstance. The atmosphere of Parliament is very unfavourable to

the growth of this inestimable quality. It engenders an opportunism which distrusts forecast and disdains all argument not adapted to its own temper. In this respect the temper of Parliament only reflects the temper of Englishmen at large; and if we reproach Peel with his lack of foresight and of those gifts with which foresight endows a statesman, we are only saying, after all, that, great Englishman as he was, he had nevertheless all the defects of his qualities.

The beginning of the end began to be seen by all those who, unlike Peel, could look ahead with unprejudiced eyes and untrammelled sympathies, when Castlereagh died and Canning took his place in 1822. Castlereagh himself, it is true, had always been favourable to the Catholic claims. But Canning brought a new spirit into the Ministry. He was not himself prepared at this time to stand or fall by the Catholic cause. He knew better than the Whigs, who had long been in opposition, could know what was the real temper of the king. He knew that so long as Eldon was Chancellor and in undisputed possession of the king's ear and confidence, any attempt to disturb the understanding on which the Government of Lord Liverpool was based would end only in his own overthrow. But he could and did pave the way for future concession by infusing a more liberal spirit into the Government. Peel at length began to discern the direction in which matters were tending. In spite of his opposition the Catholic cause was manifestly growing in strength year by year. There were occasional ebbs and flows in the parliamentary tide, but on the whole it had steadily advanced. The Catholic Association was suppressed in 1825, and

Canning himself acquiesced in its suppression. But in that same year a Bill for the removal of the Catholic disabilities was introduced by Sir Francis Burdett, and carried on a second reading by a majority of twenty-seven. Plunket by this time had, through the growing influence of O'Connell, been deposed from the parliamentary championship of the Catholics, because he was held to be inclined with Canning to doubt the possibility of a settlement in existing circumstances; and a plan had been concerted between the Catholic leaders and their parliamentary friends whereby the removal of Catholic disabilities was to be accompanied by certain securities—the two "wings," as they were called at the time. These wings were an alteration of the Irish franchise on the one hand, and a provision for the Catholic clergy of Ireland on the other. Burdett took charge of the Catholic Bill; the Bill for the payment of the Catholic clergy by the State was committed to Lord Francis Egerton, afterwards Earl of Ellesmere, who became Chief Secretary for Ireland in the Ministry of Wellington; while the Franchise Bill was entrusted to Mr. Littleton, afterwards Lord Hatherton, who in 1833 succeeded Stanley in the same post in the Ministry of Lord Grey. The wings were carried on a second reading by larger majorities than that which had supported the Catholic Bill.

It was the result of these divisions, especially that on the Catholic Bill, that finally convinced Peel that the time had come for his retirement from the Cabinet of Lord Liverpool. It was not that he had persuaded himself that the Catholic claims ought to be conceded, though twenty years afterwards an attempt was made by his

enemies to prove that this was the case.[1] He thought at this time, and for nearly four years afterwards, that the Catholic claims ought still to be resisted. But he had no confidence in the power of the Government or of the Tory party to resist them, nor could he be sure that Canning's growing influence would not sway the Government round to the side of concession. In that case he was perfectly clear that he ought not to be a party to the measure. In one of the debates on Sir Francis Burdett's Bill, Canning had dwelt with eloquence and feeling on the sacrifices he had made for the cause of Catholic emancipation. In particular he said he had surrendered the dearest ambition of his political life—his life-long desire to represent the University in which he was educated. "I adhered," he said, "to the Catholic cause, and forfeited all my long-cherished hopes and expectations. . . . Sir, the representation of the University has fallen into worthier hands. I rejoice with my right honourable friend near me on the high honour which he has obtained. Long may he enjoy the distinction, and long may it prove a source of reciprocal pride to our parent University and to himself! Never to this hour have I stated, either in public or in private, the extent of this irreparable sacrifice; but I have felt it not the less deeply. It is past, and I shall speak of it no more."

The statesman who heard these words must have felt that the representation of the University of Oxford stood like a flaming sword between himself and concession. He might think that the change must come,

[1] For the "Canning episode," as it was called, see the chapter under that heading in Disraeli's *Lord George Bentinck, a Political Biography*, a work which throws a flood of light on the character and career of Peel.

he must think that it ought not to come through him. Come through him it ultimately did; but that was only because the paramount sense of duty to the position in which he was placed, and from which he could not escape, overpowered the obligation of consistency. But in 1825 the position was one from which he thought he could escape. He was almost the only minister in the House of Commons who opposed the Catholic claims. He was also the minister primarily responsible for the government of Ireland. "When I then saw the numbers arrayed against me," he said in 1829, "I felt that my position as a minister was untenable. The moment, sir, that I, the minister responsible for the government of Ireland, found that I was left in a minority on the question which was of paramount interest and importance to that country, that moment I sought to be relieved from the duties and responsibility of office. I stated to the Earl of Liverpool, who was then at the head of the administration, that in consequence of the decision given against me in this House, it was my anxious wish to be relieved from office. It was, however, notified to me that my retirement would occasion the retirement of the Earl of Liverpool; and that such an event would at once produce a dissolution of the administration, the responsibility of which would rest with me. . . . If I had acted simply in obedience to my own wishes I would have resigned. I was induced, however, to retain office, and to ascertain the result of another appeal to the country by a general election."

The general election of 1826 did not materially strengthen the Catholic cause in Parliament. In 1827 a majority of the House decided against the Catholic

question. But the election of 1826 produced results in Ireland which must have shown the opponents of the Catholic claims the hollowness of the ground on which they were standing. An Act of the Irish Parliament passed in 1793 had conferred the right to vote in county elections on freeholders of the annual value of 40s. and upwards, Catholic and Protestant alike. These so-called freeholders were not freeholders in the ordinary sense, but rather holders of a life-interest of 40s. created at the will of the landlord. Thus the franchise of the 40s. freeholder was a political engine fashioned to the hand of the Protestant landowner. The so-called freeholders were expected to vote at the bidding of the landlord, and in the first quarter of the century it was the universal practice to drive them to the poll like droves of cattle. In 1826, however, the freeholders for the first time broke loose from their masters and voted at the bidding of the Catholic leaders. They could not vote for Catholic candidates who, if elected, could not sit in Parliament, but they could and did vote for Protestant candidates known to be favourable to the Catholic claims. The influence of Lord Waterford was in this way attacked in Waterford and that of Lord Roden in Louth; in both cases the landlord's candidate was beaten, Mr. Villiers Stuart being returned for Waterford and Mr. Dawson for Louth. Mr. Villiers Stuart was a large landowner himself, and Mr. Dawson was a retired barrister; both were Protestants of course, but both were favourable to the Catholic claims, and were supported with all the influence of the Catholic leaders. The priests had supplanted the landlords in the control of the peasantry; the Catholic Association,

suppressed though it was, was stronger than the Protestant ascendency. "The landlord has been disarmed by the priest, and the fear of spiritual denunciations, acting in unison with the excited passions and feelings of the multitude, has already severed in some cases, and will sever in others, unless we interfere to prevent it, every tie between the Protestant proprietor and the lower class of his Roman Catholic tenantry. The weapon which he has forged with so much care, and has heretofore wielded with such success, has broken short in his hand." So spoke Peel in 1829 when his eyes had at last been opened by the election of O'Connell for the county of Clare.

But Peel's eyes were not opened by the Waterford election of 1826. In the spring of 1827 Sir Francis Burdett once more brought forward a motion for the removal of the Catholic disabilities. It was rejected by a majority of four. Canning supported it and Peel opposed it, taking as strongly as ever the line of uncompromising resistance. "If the House and the country were against him he had no answer to such an argument. He should bow with reverence to the opinion of a majority of the assembly which he saw before him; he should pray with all his heart that they might be right, and that he might be wrong, but he should remain unconvinced. . . . The influence of some great names had lately been lost to the cause which he supported. . . . Keen as the feelings of regret must be with which the loss of those associates in feeling was recollected, it was still a matter of consolation to him that he had now an opportunity of showing his adherence to those tenets which he had formerly espoused, of showing that if his opinions were unpopular, he stood by them still, when the influence

and authority that might have given them currency was gone, and when it was impossible, he believed, that in the mind of any human being he could stand suspected of pursuing his principles with any view to favour or personal aggrandisement."

The meaning of this was that the Duke of York, the heir to the throne and an implacable opponent of the Catholic claims, had died at the beginning of the year, and that shortly before the debate in which Peel spoke, Lord Liverpool had been stricken with the illness which removed him from the head of affairs. A period of confusion followed. The king would have liked an anti-Catholic Ministry to be formed, but failing that, he desired that the principles on which Lord Liverpool's Government had acted in regard to the Catholic claims should still be pursued. Canning was willing to retire in order to make room for an anti-Catholic Ministry, but he was not willing to retain office and to continue to lead the House of Commons under an anti-Catholic Prime Minister. Canning, in fact, meant to be Prime Minister or else not to be a minister at all. Peel, who was willing to recognise the priority of Canning's claims, but was nevertheless determined not to hold office under Canning as the only important minister opposed to Catholic emancipation, endeavoured to compromise matters by suggesting that Wellington should be Prime Minister. Canning rejected the suggestion, and at last the king commissioned Canning himself to form a Government. Thereupon Peel and Wellington resigned their offices, and their example was followed by all those members of the late administration who shared their opinions. Canning formed a Ministry composed of the more

liberal and progressive members of the Tory party, and before the session closed it was strengthened by a coalition with Lord Lansdowne and a section of the Whigs. Lord Grey held aloof and mercilessly attacked Canning's policy, foreign and domestic, in the House of Lords. Canning was always mistrusted by the Tories, and never had the confidence of the older and more orthodox Whigs. But Peel's behaviour to him was unexceptionable, at any rate on the personal side. He had always made it clear that he would not take or hold office under a Prime Minister favourable to the Catholic claims. Canning was probably cognisant of his desire to resign his office in 1825, and his refusal to serve under Canning was the natural corollary to that desire. Croker, it is true, tells a story of a walk he took with Peel to call upon Huskisson a day or two after Lord Liverpool's seizure. He professes to have inferred from what occurred during this walk, founding his opinion on "Peel's *very peculiar manners*," and on a certain squeeze of the arm which he gave his companion as they passed Lord Eldon's house, that Peel at that time "had no idea of separating himself from Canning." But Peel's very peculiar manners included a caution and a secrecy that were almost morbid, and he was certainly not the man to declare his mind, even to a friend like Croker, at a time when he could not know that Canning would even have a chance of becoming Prime Minister. What is certain is that Canning and Peel parted on friendly terms. On 1st May, when his Ministry was formed and Peel had explained at length his reasons for retiring, Canning bore warm testimony to Peel's candour, sincerity, just feelings, and high

principle, and added: "From the beginning of these discussions I foresaw—both of us foresaw—that they must terminate in a separation which I hope to God may only be for a time."

Canning died in August 1827, almost as soon as his Ministry had been definitely established by an alliance with Lord Lansdowne and the Whigs. He was succeeded by Lord Goderich, afterwards Earl of Ripon—Disraeli's "transient and embarrassed phantom"; but before the end of the year Goderich, who was quite unequal to the post, resigned in consequence of a paltry misunderstanding between Huskisson and Herries, two of his colleagues. The king commissioned Wellington to form a Government, expressing his conviction that it must be composed of persons of both opinions with respect to the Roman Catholic question; it was also understood that this question was not to be made a Cabinet question. The Whigs who had joined Canning now retired, but the more liberal Tories who had followed the fortunes of Canning and shared his opinions remained for a time in the new Ministry. Peel returned to the Home Office, and now became for the first time leader of the House of Commons. Lyndhurst, who had succeeded Eldon when Canning became Prime Minister, remained Chancellor in the new Government. The most important measure of the session of 1828 was the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act, which was proposed by Lord John Russell and carried by the Whigs in spite of Peel's opposition. The measure was designed rather for the removal of a sentimental grievance and a social stigma than for the abatement of a practical disability, since the omission of dissenters to take the sacramental

test on admission to civil office was condoned by an Annual Indemnity Act. Peel secured the insertion of a declaration calculated to soothe the susceptibilities of churchmen, and with this safeguard the Bill was quietly accepted even by the House of Lords. Sir Francis Burdett's resolution for considering the laws relative to the Roman Catholics was once more carried by a majority of six, but the ministers still declined to move, and the House of Lords sustained them in their obstinacy. Nevertheless the crisis was at hand.

A Bill had been introduced for modifying the franchise of East Retford by the extension of the right of voting to the adjacent hundred. The Whigs proposed a clause transferring the franchise to Birmingham, which at that time, like Manchester and other large towns, was without representation in Parliament. Huskisson voted in favour of the transfer, which had been opposed by the Government. He then went home, and on the same night wrote to the Prime Minister to tender his resignation. This letter was apparently meant by its writer to be an act of contrition, not to be attended with penal consequences. But the duke was a soldier, unused to insubordination, and apt to take men at their word. He forthwith accepted the resignation, and in spite of Huskisson's remonstrances and explanations, declined to allow him to withdraw it. Thereupon the Canningites, who regarded Huskisson as their leader, withdrew in a body from the Ministry. Vesey Fitzgerald, an intimate friend of Peel, was appointed President of the Board of Trade in the place of Grant who had retired, and was thereby compelled to seek re-election for the county of Clare. He had supported the Catholic claims and was

not unpopular with the peasantry. Nevertheless, after some hesitation, the Catholic party in Ireland determined to put forward O'Connell as his opponent. It was a declaration of war, bold, unexpected, and skilfully timed. The Waterford election of 1826 had shown the power of the peasantry, the Clare election of 1828 was now to show the determination of the Catholics. Fitzgerald's candidature was supported by the whole strength of the landlords and Protestant gentry; but O'Connell was supported by a new Catholic Association, so constituted as to evade the Act passed in 1825 for the suppression of its predecessor, and by all the peasantry and their priests. The contest lasted for some days, amid much excitement, though without disturbance of the peace. But Fitzgerald's return was hopeless from the outset, and at the end of five days' polling he retired. "I have polled all the gentry," he wrote to Peel on 5th July, "and all the fifty-pound freeholders—the gentry to a man. . . . All the great interests broke down, and the desertion has been universal. Such a scene as we have had! Such a tremendous prospect as it opens to us!"

"A prospect tremendous, indeed!" wrote Peel many years afterwards in commenting on Fitzgerald's letter. In a moment the fabric of resistance to the Catholic claims had crumbled to pieces. What had happened in Clare might happen at a general election in every county constituency in Ireland. O'Connell, it is true, could not take his seat in the House of Commons, nor could any other Catholic who might be elected. But that merely aggravated the difficulty of the situation. It made civil war the only alternative to concession; and even civil

war, a conflict between classes and creeds in Ireland, was not the worst evil to be feared. The Duke of Wellington, the first soldier of the age, was Prime Minister of England. The Marquis of Anglesey, another soldier of renown, was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Neither could be confident that the contagion of Catholic sympathies would not spread to the Catholic soldiery of the Crown, and add to the horrors of civil war the confusion of military discord.

At last Peel's eyes were opened. His lack of foresight was now to be redeemed by that incomparable insight, that supreme capacity for the conduct of current affairs, the management of men and the control of events, in which he has had few rivals among English statesmen. He saw at once that the time for a change was come. Even before the Clare election he had warned Wellington that it would not be possible for him to remain in the Ministry and to lead the House of Commons now that the vote of that House had again placed him in a minority with regard to the Catholic claims; and as the resolution of Sir Francis Burdett, which had previously passed the House of Commons, was about to be discussed in the House of Lords, he entreated the duke to take such a course in debate as would not preclude him, who was less deeply committed on the question than himself, from taking the whole question of Ireland into consideration during the recess, with the view of adjusting the Catholic question. He still thought, however, that he might himself escape from the obligation of carrying out that adjustment. But the nemesis of lost opportunities does not thus easily spare its victims. Peel was destined by a fate

inexorable but not unjust to be the instrument of repairing the mischief which he himself had largely caused. His political failings had brought matters to this pass; his political gifts were now to be employed, since no other was equal to the task, to save the State and pacify the country.

The new situation was not immediately taken into consideration by the Cabinet. But Peel and the duke saw at once that a crisis had come, and very shortly after the close of the session the duke sent to Peel a memorandum on the state of Ireland which he had communicated to the king. Peel replied in two days with a full exposition of his views. Having now fully convinced himself that, though concession might still be resisted, and resisted for a time with success, it ought not to be so resisted by patriotic statesmen, he resolved for his own part that, whatever might be the personal sacrifices involved, he himself would no longer resist it. He would give the ministers who undertook the settlement all the assistance in his power, but he still thought that it would not be advantageous to the king's service that he should himself originate the measure as a minister. "Every consideration," he wrote, "of private feelings and individual interests must be disregarded. From a very strong sense of what is best for the success of the measure, I relieve you from all difficulties with respect to myself. I do not merely volunteer my retirement at whatever may be the most convenient time; I do not merely give you the promise that out of office (be the sacrifices that I foresee, private and public, what they may) I will cordially co-operate with you in the settlement of this question, and cordially

support your Government; but I add to this my decided and deliberate opinion, that it will tend to the satisfactory adjustment of the question if the originating of it in the House of Commons, and the general superintendence of its progress, be committed to other hands than mine."

This letter and the memorandum which accompanied it were communicated by the duke to the Lord Chancellor, but to no other member of the Cabinet. Externally the ministers still continued to maintain an attitude of apparent resistance to the Catholic claims, while Peel himself preserved an ominous silence. The king had not yet been consulted, and even the members of the Cabinet were not aware of what was passing in the minds of its two chiefs. The secrecy and apparent guile thus practised by Peel have been much censured. His conduct was, however, constitutionally correct—for the announcement of a change of ministerial policy must be preceded by the approval of the sovereign and the assent of the Cabinet—and it was probably politically necessary. Having made up his mind that the final adjustment of the Catholic question was necessary to the peace and safety of the State, Peel was bound to do nothing that might tend in any way to prejudice that adjustment. This obligation superseded all others for a time. To disallow it is to apply the abstract ethics of the schools to one of the most delicate problems of parliamentary casuistry.

The plain truth is, that what the ministers had now to do was not merely to adjust a political question, but to prevent a revolution. As constitutional ministers they could not hesitate. The only question was whether

the concession could be made in time to avert the revolution. The Lord Lieutenant wrote to Peel on 2d July 1828: "Such is the extraordinary power of the association, or rather of the agitators—of whom there are many of high ability, of ardent mind, of great daring—that I am quite certain they could lead on the people to open rebellion at a moment's notice; and their organisation is such that in the hands of desperate and intelligent leaders they would be extremely formidable." In September, however, he wrote that a rising in the winter was not to be expected; "therefore it appears probable that you will have time to legislate before we begin to fight." Later in the year Lord Francis Egerton, the Chief Secretary, expressed his conviction that if nothing were done the expulsion of O'Connell from the House of Commons would be the signal for a rising. In the meanwhile the Protestants in both countries were becoming excited and alarmed. The more moderate of the Irish Protestants, and even the more intelligent of the Orangemen, were beginning to see that concession could not be longer resisted. But their more headstrong brethren began to form "Brunswick" clubs, as they were called, modelled on the Catholic Association, supported by a Protestant rent, and designed, if necessary, to take the field against the Catholic peasantry. In England Protestant feeling was also beginning to be roused, and the "men of Kent" assembled in thousands on Penenden Heath in October for the purpose of supporting the Irish Brunswickers. In both countries the political atmosphere was fast "growing electric."

Notwithstanding this state of affairs, the question

was not brought before the Cabinet until early in January 1829. The well-known attitude of the king was the great obstacle. For a time it seemed insuperable. In the hope of overcoming the royal scruples Wellington had in the first week of the year sought an interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishops of London and Durham, and endeavoured to persuade them to exert their high ecclesiastical authority in relieving the conscience of the king and securing his assent to a measure regarded by his ministers as necessary to the safety of the State. The attempt was unavailing. The three prelates declared with one accord that they could not lend their sanction to the proposed course of proceeding, but must offer a decided opposition to the removal of Roman Catholic disabilities. The previous recall of the Marquis of Anglesey from Ireland, in consequence of conduct which seemed to show that the Lord Lieutenant and the Prime Minister were at variance, and that the latter still declined to recognise the necessity of concession, had increased the embarrassments of the ministers and added to the perplexity of the public mind. Peel now, on 12th January, once more represented to the duke that the time was come for a decision, strongly urged that frank concession was the only course to be pursued, and expressed a wish to retire at once, unless, in the judgment of the duke, his retirement should prove an insuperable obstacle to the adoption of that course. By this time the Cabinet had been consulted, and all the ministers but two, who afterwards gave way, had expressed their concurrence in the course recommended by Peel and the duke. The king still hesitated

Peel's letter to the duke, which had been communicated to him, failed to overcome his hesitation, and on discovering this the duke wrote to Peel, pointing out the difficulties which surrounded him, and saying, "I'll tell you fairly that I do not see the smallest chance of getting the better of these difficulties if you should not continue in office."

This decided Peel. He told the duke at once that he would remain in office and propose the contemplated measures, if the king's consent could be obtained. The measures adopted were those which he had recommended—the suppression of the Catholic Association, the unreserved removal of the Catholic disabilities without material restrictions or safeguards, and the disfranchisement of the 40s. freeholders. With the exception of the unqualified removal of the Catholic disabilities, they were not, perhaps, very statesmanlike measures, if the object was not merely to avert a revolution but to pacify Ireland and make the Union a reality; but they were probably the best that could be extorted at the time from an obstinate sovereign, a reluctant legislature, a hostile Church, and a hesitating people. The suppression of the Catholic Association was unnecessary and impolitic; the Association had done its work, and would probably have died a natural death; to suppress it was to revive it. The few safeguards provided against Catholic aggression were trivial and needlessly irritating. O'Connell was excluded from the advantage of the Act by a piece of vindictiveness unworthy of serious statesmen, and directly due to the malign influence of the king. The disfranchisement of the 40s. freeholders, euphemistically described

by Peel as "the regulation of the elective franchise," was little short of an outrage. One of Peel's arguments in its favour has already been quoted; it sounds strange in the ears of a democratic generation accustomed to regard the franchise as an instrument of popular freedom, not as a weapon of class ascendency.

These measures were approved by the Cabinet, and the reluctant assent of the king having been at last obtained, the policy of the Government was announced in the speech from the throne at the opening of Parliament on 5th February. The suppression of the Catholic Association was the first measure proposed: "His majesty recommends," continued the speech, "that when this essential object shall have been accomplished, you should take into your deliberate consideration the whole condition of Ireland, and that you should review the laws which impose civil disabilities on his majesty's Roman Catholic subjects." Thus the policy to be pursued by the Government was now revealed to the whole country; but it was not until many years afterwards that the motives and considerations of State which compelled Peel to act as he did were fully made known. At the time the astonishment and indignation were almost universal. "*Nusquam tuta fides*" was the sentiment which found expression from the lips of a Tory member in the House of Commons. The Home Secretary was accused on all hands of unexampled duplicity and treachery. He could only partially and incompletely defend himself, and to the vulgar, the heedless, and the ignoble his partial and incomplete explanations seemed to be merely a cloak for boundless ambition and unblushing tergiversation. To a man of his sensitive temperament

and proud consciousness of rectitude the torture must have been exquisite. It was borne without a murmur.

The day before Parliament met Peel wrote to the Vice-Chancellor to announce his intention of resigning his seat for the University of Oxford. His friends nominated him for re-election, but after a sharp contest his opponent, Sir Robert Inglis, a respectable Tory and the champion of the Protestant party, was returned by a majority of 755 votes to 609. He then sought election for Westbury, a constituency in which a convenient vacancy had been created through the influence of its patron, Sir Manasseh Lopez. He was not elected without some difficulty and much opposition. Something like a riot occurred at the nomination. An opposition candidate in the Protestant interest was on his way, but he arrived too late to be put in nomination, and Peel was thus enabled to return to Parliament in time to introduce the measure for the removal of the Roman Catholic disabilities.

In the meanwhile, however, a change had occurred in the mind of the king, and in what he called his conscience. He summoned the duke, Peel, and Lyndhurst to Windsor on 4th March, and asked for further details as to the measure to be introduced on the morrow in the House of Commons. They explained its character, and stated once more that it was proposed so to modify the oath of supremacy as to enable Roman Catholics to take it. To this the king flatly refused his assent. Thereupon the ministers present, collectively and individually, tendered their resignations, and went back to London to inform their colleagues that the Government was at an end. Late at night, however, the duke re-

ceived a communication from the king to the effect that not seeing his way to obtain a new Ministry, he authorised his present advisers to proceed with the contemplated measures. Peel and the duke considered that, after what had occurred, it was necessary to receive a further assurance that the measures in contemplation were proposed "with the entire consent and sanction of his majesty"; and this assurance having been given—or rather, perhaps, extorted—in the course of the day, Peel rose in the House of Commons on 5th March to introduce the measure. In covert reference to what had occurred in the royal closet, he opened his speech with the words: "I rise as a minister of the king, and sustained by the just authority which belongs to that character, to vindicate the advice given to his majesty by a united cabinet." The speech, which occupied four hours in delivery and was received with immense applause, was not perhaps one of Peel's happiest efforts. It was a thoroughly statesmanlike performance, masterly in arrangement, and cogent in reasoning, but tinged with the melancholy of a great recantation. A palinode can never be as effective as a song of triumph.

The Bill passed with comparative ease through the House of Commons, though the attacks upon Peel's conduct were incessant and relentless, and the Protestant feeling of the country was beginning to grow alarmed. In the House of Lords the second reading was carried by a majority of 105, in the teeth of Eldon and the bishops. Lord Eldon, however, still entertained the hope that the king might be persuaded to withhold his assent. This old man—of whom it was said that "in the history of the universe no man has the praise of

having effected as much good for his fellow-creatures as Lord Eldon has thwarted"—had ceased to be Chancellor when Canning appointed Lyndhurst in his place in 1827, but he had not lost the confidence of the king. In maudlin agony over scruples which every act of his private life had set at naught, though they were now paraded at the risk of convulsing his kingdom, the king turned to Eldon, and besought him to save him from his ministers. Eldon hinted, not obscurely, that if his conscience dictated such a step, it was constitutionally open to him to withhold his assent from the passing of the Bill. But George IV was not the man to risk his crown for a scruple, and Eldon had the mortification of writing to his daughter on 14th April: "The fatal Bill received the royal assent yesterday afternoon. After all I had heard in my visits, not a day's delay! God bless us and His Church."

Thus Peel accomplished what was certainly the most difficult and not perhaps the least noble achievement of his life. He had conquered himself for the good of the State. He had sacrificed everything which a public man holds most dear—party connection, private friendship, even public reputation for a time—to an overpowering sense of public duty. His justification lies in the maxim—far truer before the Reform Bill than afterwards—that only Tories can carry great changes in England. Nothing but the immense authority of Wellington could have induced the Tories to pass the Catholic Relief Bill. Nothing but Peel's consummate tact in affairs could have overcome the resistance of the king. For more than twenty years the Whigs had been ostracised for their fidelity to this cause. Canning

gave his life to it in vain. In a single session Peel and Wellington overcame the resistance of a hostile sovereign, a hostile Church, a hostile House of Lords, and a public opinion fast growing hostile. Yet the real credit was not theirs, as Peel had the insight to see and the generosity to acknowledge. "The credit belongs to others," he said in his speech on the second reading, "not to me. It belongs to Mr. Fox, to Mr Grattan, to Mr. Plunket, to the gentlemen opposite, and to an illustrious and right honourable friend of mine, now no more. By their efforts, in spite of my opposition, it has proved victorious. . . . I was on terms of the most friendly intimacy with my right honourable friend down even to the day of his death; and I say with as much sincerity of heart as man can speak, that I wish he were now alive to reap the harvest which he sowed and to enjoy the triumph which his exertions gained. I would say of him, as he said of the late Mr. Perceval, 'Would he were here to enjoy the fruits of his victory!'

Tuque tuis armis, nos te poteremur Achille."

The tribute was well merited and not ungenerously expressed; but perhaps if the shade of Canning could have revisited the House of Commons, and could have watched Peel, shorn of the prize for which both had contended, writhing in agony at the whips and scorns of time, the irony of circumstance, the revenge of neglected opportunities, and the reproaches of friends who felt themselves abandoned and betrayed, the words to rise almost unbidden to his phantom lips might have been

Pallas te, hoc vulnere, Pallas
Immolat, et pœnas scelerato ex sanguine sumit.

CHAPTER V

THE REFORM OF PARLIAMENT

1830–1833

CATHOLIC emancipation proved to be the death-blow of the Wellington Government. The old parties had gone to pieces. Canning's death fatally interrupted the natural evolution of a new order. Canning had attracted to himself the more progressive of the Tories and the more moderate of the Whigs. His own toryism still clinging to him like the outer integument of a chrysalis, made him the opponent of parliamentary reform. But this antagonism was accidental, not organic. Canning was not the man to regard the parliamentary system of 1827 as perfect. In those days, as the crafty Croker officiously reminded him during the crisis which followed the retirement of Lord Liverpool, the Tory aristocracy controlled about 200 seats in the House of Commons and the Whigs about 70. Croker accordingly urged him to consider "how impossible it was to do anything satisfactory towards a Government in this country without the help of the aristocracy." To this Canning instantly replied: "Whether in or out of office I will not act (as I never

have acted) as the tool of any confederacy, however powerful." In these words the discerning eye may detect the presage of parliamentary reform. But in a few months the aristocracies, especially the Tory aristocracy, had hunted Canning to death,—hunted him to death, as Greville said, with their besotted and ignorant hostility; and the old Tory party again came into power for a time under Wellington. It was impossible for the duke to ally himself with the Whigs, and even with the Canningites, nominal Tories as they were, he was unable to maintain a permanent connection. The duke himself dismissed the Canningites, and probably thought he was well rid of them. Catholic emancipation alienated the high Tories—though resistance to the Catholic claims had never been an indispensable article of the Tory creed—and thenceforth the duke held office only on sufferance, until at the close of 1830 he was hurled from power, having made himself almost as unpopular in England as Polignac was in France.

The duke never could understand that the old toryism was dead. Peel was certainly more enlightened. His whole administration of the Home Office had been inconsistent with those principles of Tory immobility which, though not inherent in toryism, had become characteristic of it in the third decade of the century. He had, as we have seen, borrowed the principles of Romilly and Mackintosh in his measures for the reform of the criminal law. In the session of 1829 he had swept away an ancient and time-honoured abuse by his reconstruction of the metropolitan police; and though his new "peelers" were unpopular for a

time, and by their unpopularity contributed not a little to the downfall of the Wellington administration, the test of time has triumphantly vindicated the skill and foresight of the minister who created the force. But on the question of parliamentary reform both ministers were equally blind or equally obstinate. The Canningites had urged that organic change might be averted by politic amendment of the representative system in detail. It was with this view that Huskisson had recommended the transfer to Birmingham of the franchise of East Retford, and Peel, it is said, had supported the same measure in the Cabinet. But the duke would listen to no such proposal, and parted with the Canningites in consequence. In the session of 1830 similar proposals were again made and again rejected. The Tory Government had abandoned its own principle when it yielded to the Catholic claims, yet it could not or would not adopt the only policy which might enable it to control and direct the political movement of the time. It fell between two stools.

During the session of 1830 the unpopularity of the Government increased with its obstinacy and with the confidence of its enemies; the death of George IV, followed by the Revolution in France, precipitated its overthrow. Its foreign policy had become odious to those who had been inspired by the more liberal ideas of Canning, and was incessantly assailed by the Whigs. At home distress was rife and discontent almost universal. The turbulent spirit of the north had invaded the south of England, and the "Swing" riots, an agrarian movement, having for its object the burning of ricks and the destruction of agricultural machinery, was

beginning to cause widespread consternation and alarm. In the midst of all these embarrassments the king died in June, and his death was followed in due course by a dissolution of Parliament. Before the polls were opened the Revolution in France had broken out. It was caused by the arbitrary measures of Polignac, who was understood to possess in a peculiar degree the friendship and confidence of Wellington. The famous *Ordonnances* which drove Charles X from the throne were signed on 25th July. Within a week the king had abdicated, and within a fortnight the Provisional Government had proclaimed Louis Philippe king of the French. The Revolution in the Netherlands, which resulted in the separation of Holland from Belgium, was the direct consequence of this movement in France.

The consequences in England were less revolutionary but not less momentous. Universal sympathy was felt with the people of France, whose liberties had been menaced by an impracticable monarch and an obstinate minister, the friend and almost the creature of Wellington. Accordingly, in the elections held during August the supporters of the Government lost heavily. Brougham was elected for Yorkshire, and Joseph Hume, a Radical and a persistent advocate of economy and retrenchment, for Middlesex. A brother-in-law and two brothers of Peel were thrown out. Peel himself found a seat at Tamworth, formerly represented by his father and afterwards by one of his brothers. His father had died in the spring, when Peel succeeded to the baronetcy, to the family estates, and to an immense fortune. From the political principles of that inflexible adherent of the older toryism the son had long drifted away. He had

disappointed his father on the currency and had carried Catholic emancipation. But his father's influence and his own lack of political divination still blinded him to the signs of the coming time.

His eyes and those of the duke were at length opened by the result of the general election. A last effort was made before Parliament met to effect a reconciliation with the Canningites. Huskisson's dismissal in 1828 had created a personal antagonism between him and the duke. They were reconciled in September at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, but a few seconds after they had shaken hands Huskisson was run over by a passing locomotive. He died the same day. Shortly afterwards the duke proposed to Palmerston that he and some of his friends should re-enter the Cabinet. But the Canningites had now become reformers, and Palmerston declined to join the duke unless Lord Grey and Lord Lansdowne were also included in the proposed arrangement. The duke, however, had only contemplated a reconciliation with the Canningites, not a coalition with the Whigs, and the negotiation fell through.

The ministers now prepared to face the inevitable. Parliament was opened by the new king in person at the end of October. The speech from the throne offered no encouragement to popular aspirations and no response to popular demands, and in the debate on the address the policy of the ministers was vigorously assailed by Lord Grey in the House of Lords and by Lord Althorp, who had now formally assumed the lead of the Opposition, in the House of Commons. They spoke in concert, and both declared that the

country was looking for a measure of parliamentary reform, though they acknowledged that they were not themselves prepared, on behalf of the Opposition, to introduce a measure dealing with the question. In reply to Grey the duke declared against all parliamentary reform in a speech which was long remembered against him. "I am fully convinced," he said, "that the country possesses at this moment a legislature which answers all the good purposes of legislation, and this to a greater degree than any legislature ever has answered in any country whatever. . . . If at the present moment I had imposed upon me the duty of forming a legislature for any country, and particularly for a country like this, in possession of great property of various descriptions, I do not mean to assert that I would form such a legislature as we possess now, for the nature of man was incapable of reaching it at once; but my great endeavour would be to form some description of legislature which would produce the same results." Under these circumstances the duke added not only that he was not prepared to propose a measure of reform, but that so long as he was a minister he would resist such measures when brought forward by others. "You have announced the fall of your Government," said a colleague to him as he sat down.

In the House of Commons Brougham, without waiting for the debate on the Address, gave notice that on 16th November he would move a resolution in favour of parliamentary reform. Before the day came, however, an unexpected occurrence had sealed the fate of the Ministry. The king had accepted an invitation to dine at the Guildhall on Lord Mayor's Day. The Lord Mayor

elect warned the Prime Minister that the state of public feeling in the metropolis was agitated, and that "a set of desperate and abandoned characters were anxious to avail themselves of any circumstance to create disturbance and confusion." He therefore requested the ministers to take measures for their own safety and the protection of the king. The new police force was still unpopular, the ministers shrank from the employment and display of military force, and preferred to recommend the king not to go to the city. Something like a panic ensued upon this "act of intrepid cowardice," as it was called by Lord Wellesley. The funds fell 3 per cent, and the ministers were everywhere condemned. It was their unpopularity, and not that of the king, which had prevented the royal visit to the city. In the House of Commons the civil list of the new reign was selected by the Opposition as the instrument of attack. On 15th November Sir Henry Parnell moved to refer the estimates presented by ministers for the purposes of the civil list to a select committee, and the motion was carried by a majority of 233 to 204. The division was unexpected, and many supporters of the Government were absent. But the ministers knew that their fate was sealed, that they could not hope to defeat Brougham's motion for reform, and they therefore took advantage of this unexpected reverse to tender their resignations. William IV had no prejudices on the subject of reform, no animosity towards the Whigs. He accordingly accepted Wellington's resignation, and commissioned Lord Grey, as the recognised chief of the Whigs, to form a new Government.

The old Tory party was now a wreck. But the

Whigs, excluded as they had been from power for nearly a generation, were all unconscious of their own strength. It was thought that they would not be able to form a Government, and that even if they were, their Government could not last. Had it been possible, they were not unwilling to form an alliance with Peel. But Peel was still opposed to reform, and was deeply committed by the rash and uncompromising declaration of Wellington. The Canningites, however, now definitely joined the Whigs, and in the administration formed by Lord Grey, Palmerston became Foreign Secretary, William Lamb, now Lord Melbourne, became Home Secretary, and Goderich, Secretary for the Colonies. Of the Whigs proper, Lord John Russell, the future leader of the party in the House of Commons and the minister selected to introduce the Reform Bill, was not at first admitted to the Cabinet; Stanley became Chief Secretary for Ireland; Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer; and Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty. Brougham, who had been offered the Attorney-Generalship and had contemptuously refused it, was made Lord Chancellor. The Duke of Richmond, who had ceased to be a Tory when Catholic emancipation was introduced, entered the Whig Cabinet as Postmaster-General.

Peel was now out of office, and for four years his influence on the politics of his country was subordinate and indirect. We might apply to him the historic phrase used by Prince Gortschakoff of Russia after the Crimean War, "*La Russie ne boude pas, elle se recueille.*" Shortly after the Tory Government had resigned he summoned a meeting of his official followers and announced his intention of abandoning the leadership

of the party and withdrawing for a time into private life. This intention was never fulfilled; from the nature of the case it was destined to be frustrated, even if it was ever seriously entertained. The fallen leader of a defeated and discredited party naturally yearns for retirement. But political life is a perpetual warfare in which the commander cannot honourably desert his post. The political outlook was dark and uncertain when the Wellington Government fell in 1830. Parties were in a state of flux. The position of Peel himself, alienated as he was from the old Tories by his concession of the Catholic claims and attached to the Canningites by his sympathy with a liberal commercial policy, was so doubtful that no one would have been greatly surprised if he had joined Lord Grey. Several of his own former colleagues were now to be found in the ranks of the Whig Government. Grey was a Whig, it is true, and Peel was still a Tory, still to remain a Tory, or at least a Conservative, for fifteen years longer. But if party connections could have been ignored, there was probably no great question on which these two statesmen were not substantially agreed. Lord Grey was a reformer of more than forty years' standing. Peel resisted the Reform Bill to the last, but throughout the debates he declared repeatedly that he would not have opposed a moderate measure of reform. In the autumn of 1830, when the Whig Government was first formed and the Canningites had joined it in a body, no man could foresee that its first act would be to introduce in the spring a measure of parliamentary reform so comprehensive in its scope, so revolutionary in its aims, as to change in the twinkling of an eye the

whole aspect and issue of national politics, to transfer at a single stroke the whole power of the State from the aristocracy to the middle class.

Hence Peel very wisely resolved to bide his time. The introduction of the Reform Bill necessarily recalled him to his place as the leader of the Tory party. His party still distrusted him, but it could not do without him. They were reunited, if not reconciled, in presence of the common foe. The four years during which Peel led the Opposition divide themselves naturally into two periods—the period of the reform struggle, which lasted from the beginning of 1831 to the end of 1832, and the period of the first reformed Parliament, which lasted from the beginning of 1833 to the end of 1834. In the first period the great middle class revolution was consummated—consummated, as Wellington aptly said, in due course of law; in the second, after a brief but glorious interval of unparalleled legislative activity, the inevitable reaction set in, and the Whig party was dismembered and overthrown by the miscarriage of its Irish policy. Against the Reform Bill Peel fought manfully, as one who leads a forlorn hope, but despondently, as one who knows that his assault is vain. The struggle was not between parties, but between a party on the one side and a nation on the other—a nation fired with enthusiasm by the unexpected thoroughness of the Whig measure of reform. In the reformed Parliament Peel forthwith altered his tactics. The old Tory party was no more; the Conservative party—a name given to it, even in the pre-reform period, by the political ingenuity of Croker—had taken its place. With powers mellowed

and temper proved by the storm of obloquy which he had encountered and weathered in 1829, Peel now once more returned to the field, in which he had no rival, of parliamentary opposition. He had learnt to measure and respect the force of public opinion, for he knew that henceforth it was to become a power before which all parties must bow. Public opinion is the sphinx of modern politics, and Peel was destined to be its Œdipus. Those who place party above the State can, if they are so minded, easily point the moral of the tragic fable.

There were giants in those days, and Peel, a giant himself, fought almost in single combat against a host. The leaders of the reform movement of 1832 were truly cast in heroic mould. Earl Grey, the Prime Minister, was a veteran reformer, and withal a statesman of the old school and type. His fidelity to his political principles had excluded him from office until he was verging upon old age; but neither age nor disappointment had quenched his popular sympathies. His upright statesmanship, his austere character, his aristocratic bearing, his commanding eloquence, the dignified and temperate simplicity of his private life, all combined to make him the ideal patrician leader of a great popular movement. The times were certainly revolutionary, and as the conflict proceeded the political feeling of the country was stirred even to its dregs. But in the midst of all the turmoil Lord Grey stood erect, inflexible, imperturbable, inexorable. He could haughtily defy the peerage as it clung with the tenacity of despair to its usurped prerogatives, and he could sternly bid the bishops to "set their house in order." But men knew that this inflexible resolve was born of no

revolutionary temper. They had learnt that the men who cause revolutions were not the Greys, but the Polignacs; and even amid the bray of demagogues and the raving of incendiaries the prudent and moderate of all parties could feel secure so long as Lord Grey stood at the helm of the State.

Next to Lord Grey stood Lord Althorp, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons. Character rather than statesmanship was the note of his political life; but as parsimony is a great revenue, so honesty is often the best endowment of a statesman. He was but an indifferent speaker, and his financial talents were far from considerable. He hated public life with a hatred which nothing but an overpowering sense of duty could have overcome. "If I had my choice," he wrote to Grey in 1835, "I should decidedly prefer anything, death not excepted, to sitting upon the Treasury bench in the House of Commons." Yet this was the man who led the House of Commons with authority, skill, and success throughout the reform struggle and for two years afterwards; whose elevation to the peerage on the death of his father in 1834 induced the king to dismiss his colleagues on the ground that there was no one to take his place. Inflexible integrity of purpose, incapacity for intrigue of any kind, unswerving loyalty to his colleagues, and unfailing courtesy to his opponents—in a word, the straightforward qualities of a high-bred English gentleman, were those which gave Lord Althorp his ascendency. His life was a martyrdom to duty, but his example became a priceless possession to his party, to the House of Commons, and to the State.

Of Lord Grey's other colleagues four were destined, in the course of time, to succeed him as Prime Minister. These were Lord Melbourne and Lord John Russell, Lord Derby and Lord Palmerston. Lord Melbourne will always be remembered as the minister who gave Queen Victoria her first lessons in statecraft. He is the most interesting political figure of his time and in some aspects the most enigmatical. He had been Chief Secretary for Ireland under Canning, and was appointed Home Secretary by Lord Grey, whom he succeeded as Prime Minister in 1834. He resumed that office at the downfall of Peel's first administration in 1835, and held it until 1841, when his political career was virtually ended by the defeat of the Whigs and the return of Peel to power. Graceful in presence, engaging in address, frank and fascinating in manner, he was perhaps better qualified by nature to conciliate than to command. The native geniality of his temperament had been saddened but not soured by the trials of his private life. His wife had been separated from him after a notorious intrigue with Lord Byron and many other flighty adventures, and died in 1828. He bore her strange humours to the last with exquisite patience, forbearance, and tenderness. His only son, to whom he was passionately attached, was feeble in body and mind, and dying young, left him alone in the world. He sought relief from the melancholy which never entirely quitted him, though it could not overpower a nature so finely tempered and so richly endowed, in the society of books—theology is said to have been his favourite reading, though his studies were wide and various—and in the distractions of public affairs. This

was the secret of his popular reputation for indolence—that touch of melancholy which imbued his statesmanship with a playful scepticism, and prompted him to damp the reforming energies of his colleagues with a "Why can't you let it alone?" Of a temperament too ardent for a cynic, too humorous for an enthusiast, he loved to conceal his native aptitude for affairs under the cloak of a wayward and whimsical nonchalance. Studious, literary, contemplative, self-centred, and never more than half understood by those about him, he seemed to lounge through public life, never taking things quite seriously, often dismissing matters of moment with a jest or an oath, occasionally disconcerting his colleagues by his inveterate *fainéantise*, and yet constantly baffling his adversaries by the depth of his knowledge, the firmness of his grasp, the sobriety of his judgment, and the real tenacity of his purpose.

Among those who sat beside Althorp in the House of Commons, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, at that time Mr. Stanley, afterwards Lord Stanley and ultimately the Earl of Derby, was the man whom all parties then regarded as the future leader of the Whigs. Of ancient lineage and noble bearing, impetuous and imperious in temper, he fascinated the House of Commons by his manly and impassioned eloquence, his unquestioned supremacy in debate, and his easy mastery of affairs. His admirers styled him the Rupert of debate. O'Connell, his deadly foe, dubbed him "Scorpion" Stanley. He was a staunch reformer in those days, and his native pugnacity of temper kept him in the front rank of the conflict; but there his sympathy with the Whigs seems to have ended. He differed from the more liberal of his colleagues on

the policy of the famous Coercion Act of 1833, and he finally parted from the Whig Government in 1834 on the question of the Irish Church. He joined Peel's Cabinet in 1841, but quitted it in 1845, when the minister found himself compelled to repeal the Corn Laws. His subsequent career as thrice Prime Minister and chief of the reconstructed Tory party is well known to the present generation. He was, with Disraeli, one of the joint-authors of the Reform Act of 1867, which established household suffrage in the boroughs, and one of his last speeches in the House of Lords was an eloquent but unavailing protest against Mr. Gladstone's measure for the disestablishment of the Irish Church. In a sense, therefore, the end of his political career was singularly consistent with its beginning. But if his sympathy with reform was no more sincere in 1832 than it was in 1867, his consistency was that of political levity, not of political conviction. He described his measure for household suffrage in the House of Lords as "a leap in the dark," and to his intimates as a plan for "dishing the Whigs." The truth is, he was always rather a political gladiator than a statesman. He lacked the sobriety, the steadiness, the austerity of an orthodox Whig. His eloquence, which enthralled a generation familiar with the classic tradition of Pitt and Fox, and still palpitating with the noble enthusiasm of Canning, was more combative than persuasive, more critical than constructive, a keen and finely-tempered weapon of parliamentary warfare dexterously wielded and relentlessly applied. It is now less remembered than the racy phrases abounding in sporting metaphor in which he recorded his impressions of current political

events. "Johnny has upset the coach" is one of these phrases which has become historical. In a speech delivered shortly after he had left the Whig Government in 1834, he accused his former colleagues of "thimble-rigging" in their dealing with the question of Irish tithes. When he first became Prime Minister in 1852, he said of his colleagues: "I have been driving a team of young horses this morning; not one had ever been in harness before, and they went beautifully." In a word, he carried into politics the high spirits, the easy temper, the light heart, and the aristocratic nonchalance which are characteristic rather of the eighteenth century than of the nineteenth; and with all his extraordinary gifts he lacked the supreme endowment of a high purpose and a noble ambition.

The history of Lord Palmerston as a prominent statesman and party leader hardly belongs to that of the reform period. Perceval had offered him the Chancellorship of the Exchequer when he was not five-and-twenty years of age, and he declined it on the score of his youth. He took instead the office of Secretary at War, and remained contentedly in that subordinate position throughout the administrations of Perceval, Liverpool, Canning, and Goderich. By the end of this time, however, he had become one of the recognised leaders of the Canningites, and when the Grey Ministry was formed he was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. But the foreign policy of the country was largely conducted by the Prime Minister himself, and it was not until he returned to the Foreign Office in the second administration of Melbourne that Palmerston began to make his own influence felt

throughout Europe. It was the profound mistrust with which Palmerston's independent policy and high-handed ways had inspired some of the Whigs, especially Lord Grey the younger, which made it impossible for Lord John Russell to form a Government in 1845 when Peel resigned in consequence of his conversion to free trade. But during the period with which we are now dealing there was little direct antagonism between Palmerston and Peel. They rarely crossed swords in debate, and Palmerston—constitutionally indifferent to reform and immersed in the business of an office which, as he told Lord Granville in 1851, involved eight hours' work a day—took but little part in the general business of the House of Commons.

It was far otherwise with Lord John Russell, who was a Whig of unimpeachable orthodoxy and a reformer of unquenchable ardour. He was not, however, accorded the position of a leader when the Grey administration was formed. He was not even a member of the Cabinet when, as Paymaster of the Forces, he introduced the first Reform Bill in 1832. He was regarded rather as a man of letters than a man of action. Men had not yet learned to discern within that diminutive frame and behind that cold and unattractive demeanour the large heart, the superb courage, the indomitable spirit, the fertility of resource, the command of parliamentary expedient, and the broad capacity for affairs which were in a few years to make Lord John Russell the leader of the House of Commons, the chief of the Whig party, and the Prime Minister of England. Stanley towered far above him, and even in 1834, shortly before the rupture which was never afterwards

healed, Melbourne told Disraeli that Stanley would be the next Whig Premier and might hold office as long as Walpole. But Stanley left the Whigs for ever in 1834, and when Lord Althorp succeeded his father in the same year, Lord John Russell stepped into his place as leader of the House of Commons. His rise was due, not to personal ascendency or commanding eloquence, but to the influence of a great name and lineage, to his own invincible tenacity of purpose, to his brilliant conduct of the Reform Bill, and to his sympathy with the popular cause. Circumstances had removed his chief rivals from his path. Stanley and Graham, his only possible competitors, had seceded from the Whig party. Lord Howick, the son of Lord Grey, was his equal in capacity and perhaps his superior in statesmanship, but he was not the man to lead a party. Inflexible, austere, contentious, and uncompromising, Lord Howick lacked the authority of his father's age and experience, nor was he endowed with those arts and gifts which are indispensable to parliamentary management. Thus for more than ten years Lord John Russell became Peel's chief antagonist in the House of Commons, and for more than twenty years his was the dominant voice in the counsels of the Whig party.

Sir James Graham was a man who might, perhaps, have aspired to the leadership had he not parted from the Whigs on the question of the Irish Church and associated his political fortunes with those of Stanley. He was a man of great capacity, a powerful and persuasive speaker, a capable administrator, a statesman of insight and resource. But his mind was cast in too speculative a mould for the broad affirmations and

uncompromising negations of party politics and controversy. He was cursed with a judicial temperament. Too much of a Tory for the Whigs, too much of a Whig for the Tories, he ultimately found refuge in that Peelite section which, after the great rupture of 1846, carried off most of the brains and all the character of the Tory party, and finally coalesced with the Whigs under the tolerant and easy-going leadership of Palmerston.

Lord Grey's Ministry was formed at the end of 1830. A committee of the new Cabinet, which Lord John Russell, though not yet a member of the Cabinet, was invited to join, was forthwith appointed to draw up the outline of a Reform Bill. The measure was prepared and submitted to the Cabinet, profound secrecy being maintained as to its nature and provisions. It was introduced in the House of Commons by Lord John Russell on 1st March 1831. Its leading provisions are now among the commonplaces of modern history. It proposed to destroy at a single blow the "rotten boroughs," as they were called, sixty in number, and to establish a uniform franchise, based on an occupation valued at £10, in every borough entitled to send representatives to Parliament. Both parties were astounded at the sweeping provisions of the measure. Peel was greatly blamed, both at the time and afterwards, for not rising immediately after Lord John Russell had sat down and declaring that the House of Commons could not entertain so revolutionary a proposal. Even Brougham thought that if this had been done the Bill would have been thrown out on its first reading. But a stroke of this kind was not to be expected from a man of Peel's cautious, cold, and calculating temperament.

He knew he was distrusted by his party, and perhaps he distrusted himself. He knew that there would be other opportunities of trying conclusions with the Whigs, and he may well have felt that if the Bill was to be defeated it was more politic to attack it in detail than to refuse it a hearing at the outset. At any rate he did not speak until the third night of the debate, and even then, though he strongly opposed the Bill, he did not venture to recommend a division to be taken against its introduction. The truth is that Peel was not yet fully restored to the leadership of the Tory party. He was by no means anxious to resume that place, preferring to remain for the time in a position of greater freedom and less responsibility. He could not but see that the mere introduction of the Reform Bill had changed the whole aspect of politics and all the relations of parties. Reform was thenceforth necessary; so much he plainly perceived. Had this conviction been forced upon him when still in office, and had the welfare of the State plainly demanded that he should himself give effect to it, he would not have shrunk from doing in 1831 what he had done in 1829. But the circumstances were now changed. The Whigs were in office, and the responsibility was now theirs. He could, and did confine himself to constitutional opposition, no longer believing that reform could be successfully resisted, but striving to render it less mischievous and less revolutionary, and not perhaps unwilling that the odium of resisting it should rest mainly with the House of Lords.

On 22d March the Reform Bill was read a second time by a majority of a single vote in one of the largest Houses ever assembled. In ordinary circumstances

ministers would have resigned, feeling that so narrow a majority on the bare principle of the measure would not enable them to overcome the still powerful forces of resistance. But they could not thus lightly abandon their trust. Public opinion outside Parliament was with them; the country was at their back. They determined to proceed, although it was pretty certain that on some point or another in committee they would be placed in a minority. On 15th April Peel wrote to Croker: "Our object must be an early majority, if possible. I prevailed on his majesty's ministers last night to promise positively to treat us to a division on this simple question, 'While the number of Irish and Scotch members is increased, shall the number of English members be reduced to the extent of thirty or forty?' I think we shall beat them on that question. . . . Give us another month and there is an end of the Bill, positively an end to it. It never could be carried except by the dread of physical force." Peel proved to be right. His parliamentary instinct was not at fault. In less than a week there was an end to the Bill, and the victory was won on the ground chosen by himself. But as he must also have foreseen, if his political judgment was as sound as his parliamentary instinct, the defeat of the Bill in Parliament would secure its ultimate triumph. Ministers only needed a valid pretext for appealing from Parliament to the people. In that event their cause was won. The dread of physical force, on which Peel seemed disposed to rely, was really the strongest weapon in the armoury of the reformers. Physical force is the *ultima ratio* of a determined people. In the last resort it decides the fate of nations, whether in peace or in war.

Before going into committee, General Gascoyne, the member for Liverpool, proposed a resolution to the effect that the number of representatives of England and Wales ought not to be diminished. The ministers endeavoured to defeat this attack by insignificant concessions, but on 19th April Gascoyne's resolution was carried by 299 votes to 291. Some few Tories, influenced by the movement of popular opinion, had voted for the second reading of the Bill; on Gascoyne's resolution they voted with the Opposition. Ministers at once resolved to recommend a dissolution. Two days after the division the House of Commons declined to proceed with committee of supply, and in the House of Lords Lord Wharncliffe gave notice of an address to the king praying him not to dissolve the Parliament. It was necessary to defeat these tactics by prompt and decisive action. If Parliament were prorogued by commission the House of Lords would be entitled to dispose of Lord Wharncliffe's motion before admitting the commissioners; but the presence of the king himself would suspend all business in both Houses. Accordingly the king, who was jealous of his prerogative and not unmindful of his popularity, agreed to go in person to Westminster. No time was to be lost. The formalities of State ceremonial were hastily hurried through or suspended. The king, it was said afterwards, was ready to go in a hackney coach, if necessary; but the State carriages were got ready in time, and no essential part of the ceremonial was omitted. After a hurried conference with his ministers the king set out, and as Lord Wharncliffe rose in the House of Lords, amid the utmost excitement and confusion, to move his

resolution, the firing of the guns in the park announced that the sovereign had left the palace. In the House of Commons the uproar and confusion were still greater, and the Speaker's authority was only saved by his tact. After an unseemly wrangle Peel obtained possession of the House, and proceeded to denounce the conduct of the ministers with extreme vehemence and passion. But his voice was silenced and the uproar stilled by the arrival of Black Rod to summon the House to the presence of the king, and in a few minutes all was over. The Parliament elected in the previous year was dissolved, and the country was invited to pronounce its judgment on the Reform Bill, its authors, and its enemies.

That judgment was speedily and decisively pronounced. The popular enthusiasm was irresistible. "The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill," was the universal cry from one end of the country to the other. The Tories and anti-Reformers were everywhere opposed and nearly everywhere defeated, and ministers secured an overwhelming majority. The new Parliament met on 21st June, and on 24th June Lord John Russell, who with Stanley had now been admitted to the Cabinet, introduced the second Reform Bill. It was not materially or essentially different from the original measure. The Bill was read a first time without a division after a single night's debate. On 8th July its second reading was carried by a majority of 136. But the debates in committee were interminable, though their effect on the structure of the Bill was quite insignificant. Every expedient of obstructive delay was attempted by the Opposition, which in this respect received little

countenance from Peel, and it was not until 21st September that the Bill passed its third reading by a majority of 345 to 236.

Then arose the memorable question, "What will the Lords do?" The answer was soon given. On 8th October the proposal to read the Bill a second time was rejected by a majority of forty-one. This was on a Saturday. On the Monday Lord Ebrington proposed in the House of Commons a vote of confidence in the ministers which was carried by a large majority. Parliament was then prorogued for a short period, in order to enable the Government to introduce a new Reform Bill. The country was disturbed, distressed, and alarmed. A serious riot took place at Bristol, occasioned by the entrance of Sir Charles Wetherell, the recorder, one of the most active and violent opponents of reform. The political unions formed for the purpose of promoting reform held meetings all over the country, and much inflammatory talk was uttered. In the midst of all this excitement the cholera made its appearance for a second time, and by the panic it engendered increased the national gloom and perplexity. Parliament reassembled on 12th December, and six days afterwards Lord John Russell introduced the third Reform Bill. Several changes had now been made in the structure of the measure, with a view to meet the criticisms of the Opposition, but its main principles were unaffected. It was no longer proposed to reduce the numbers of the House of Commons, and the scheme of disfranchisement was based on a principle or test which combined, as Lord John Russell explained, "the number of persons, the number of houses, and the amount of assessed taxes

paid by the borough." Lord John Russell's speech was deprecatory and apologetic. He entreated the opponents of the Bill not to fear, and its friends not to expect too much from it. This gave Peel a great advantage in reply. "Your present concessions," he said in effect, "justify all the steps which the Opposition have taken, and your present tone, deprecatory, minimising, and apologetic, compels us to ask why you have raised all this turmoil?" Nevertheless, he announced his intention still to oppose the principles of the Bill.

Before Christmas the second reading of the Bill was carried by a majority of two to one. The House of Commons then adjourned, but resumed early in January, and after three weeks had been spent in committee, the Bill was finally passed without a division on 23d March. Meanwhile much anxious negotiation had been going on between the ministers and two peers, Lord Wharncliffe and Lord Harrowby, who represented a small body of peers known as the Waverers. The ministers were in great difficulties. The enthusiasm of the king had cooled, and the resistance of the House of Lords had not been overcome. The king had been told that, in order to secure the passing of the Bill, it might be necessary to create peers in sufficient numbers to provide a steady majority, and to this extreme course he was stoutly opposed. Lord Grey himself and many of his colleagues were anxious, if possible, to avoid forcing the king and humiliating the House of Lords, though they were equally determined not to abandon the cause of reform. The negotiations with the Waverers were only partially successful. The Waverers acted like the Tory members of the House of Commons, who had

voted for the second reading of the first Bill, and secured the second reading in the House of Lords by a majority of nine. But the ministers were soon placed in a minority in committee. Lyndhurst moved that the disfranchising clauses should be postponed until the clauses relating to enfranchisement had been considered. This was carried by a majority of thirty-five. The Prime Minister then demanded of the king the power to create a number of peers—about fifty was the number indicated—sufficient to secure the passing of the Bill. The king refused, and the ministers resigned.

The king now sent for Lyndhurst and instructed him to apply to the Tory leaders, with a view to forming a Government. But the king knew by this time that a comprehensive reform of Parliament was necessary to the peace and welfare of the State, and thinking that a Tory Ministry would, as in 1829, be able to neutralise the resistance of the House of Lords, he told Lyndhurst that the new Government must be prepared to introduce such a Bill. Lyndhurst applied to Wellington and to Peel. The duke, faithful to the maxim that the king's Government must be carried on, was ready to take office. But Peel flatly refused. "I foresee," he wrote to Croker on 12th May, "that a Bill of reform, including everything that is really important and really dangerous in the present Bill, must pass. For me individually to take the conduct of such a Bill, to assume the responsibility of the consequences which I have predicted as the inevitable result of such a Bill, would be, in my opinion, personal degradation to myself." From this determination Peel could not be moved. An attempt was made to form a Government under Manners

Sutton, the Speaker, as Prime Minister and leader of the House of Commons, but this and other contemplated arrangements were frustrated by what occurred in the House of Commons itself. Lord Ebrington once more moved a vote of confidence in the retiring Ministry, and several petitions were presented praying the House to stop the supplies until reform was carried. In a debate on one of these petitions, presented on 14th May—a debate almost unexampled for confusion, uproar, and excitement—Alexander Baring, a Tory who had consented to take office under Wellington and was understood to represent the duke in the House of Commons, declared that he saw no reason why the late ministers should not return to office and proceed with their Bill. This unexpected and maladroit declaration brought the crisis to an end. On hearing of what had passed in the House of Commons the duke informed the king that a Tory Government was impossible, and the king was thus compelled to recall his former ministers. Before resuming office Lord Grey obtained full power to create as many peers as might be needed, but, as is well known, the necessity for exercising this power was obviated by the suggestion of the king to Wellington that a sufficient number of peers should withdraw from further opposition to the Bill. In a few weeks the Bill was finally passed, and the long struggle was at an end.

CHAPTER VI

THE REFORMED PARLIAMENT AND THE CRISIS OF 1834

1833–1835

THROUGHOUT the reform struggle Peel is seen somewhat at a disadvantage. He is undergoing the discipline of adversity. He is not the hero of the fight; he is not the master of the situation. There is a breach between him and his former followers, a breach not merely of unmerited distrust but of real divergence. Men could not understand his tactics. Yet the explanation is not far to seek. Peel had taken to heart the lessons of 1829 and 1830; his followers had not. He strenuously opposed the Reform Bill and the ministers who introduced it. He certainly disapproved of the measure and thought it revolutionary; but his opposition was that of a man who knew that public opinion was against him, and that the country was determined to insist on the emancipation of the popular legislature from the usurped domination of a class. But he was no longer in sympathy with the old toryism. Hence for a time his authority as a leader was impaired. The old Tories had not forgiven him for what they regarded as his betrayal in 1829. The truth is he only gradually

acquired his skill and ascendency as a party leader, especially as a leader of opposition. His mind was always open to new impressions, to the influence of reason and reflection, even to the arguments of his opponents. Hence he was always disconcerting those who regard a leader as nothing more than the depositary and exponent of the average sentiments of a party.

After the passing of the Reform Bill, however, Peel rapidly recovered and long retained his ascendency over his followers. The Parliament elected in 1832 was essentially a middle-class Parliament. The Whigs secured an enormous majority, reinforced by a compact body of Radicals. Over three hundred new members were returned by the new constituencies, and the Tories who were returned had had to accommodate themselves more or less to the new ideas and aspirations that were working throughout the electorate. The majority were for the most part an undisciplined host. Their leaders were many of them inexperienced, while the Tory leaders, on the other hand, still enjoyed the prestige of a long tenure of power, and the advantage of a wide experience of public affairs. The Whigs were sustained by the impulse and inspiration of a great popular movement, the Tories by a natural confidence in that conservative temper which is inherent in the national character. Peel at once comprehended the change. He was now to lead the class to which he himself belonged alike by birth, by habit of mind, and by affinity of temperament. The new Parliament was largely composed of middle-aged men, solid in substance, sober in temper, serious, practical, bent upon great reforms, and determined to make their influence felt in the state, but

New gov't meek.

inexperienced in public affairs, and perhaps a little dismayed at the completeness of the victory they had achieved. They thought themselves reformers, and unhesitatingly assumed the title. They knew that the country expected them to make good the transfer of political power from the landed aristocracy to the classes on which the prosperity of England now rested, to carry out those legislative changes for which the demand had matured in the public mind during the long Tory domination, and so far they were united, determined, and irresistible. But from the very beginning there were seeds of discord amongst them and the materials of an inevitable reaction. Peel had only to bide his time and it was certain that sooner or later the country and the Parliament would once more be at his feet.

He lost no time in explaining how he viewed the situation. "In 1833," he says in his *Memoirs*, "I took my seat in a small minority as a member of the first Parliament summoned under the Reform Act. In the debate on the Address I used the following expressions:—'The King's Government had abstained from all unseemly triumph in the King's Speech respecting the measure of reform. He (Sir R. Peel) would profit by their example, and would say nothing upon that head, but consider *that question as finally and irrevocably disposed of*. He was now determined to look forward to the future alone, and considering the constitution as it existed, to take his stand on main and essential matters, to join in resisting every attempt at new measures which could not be stirred without unsettling the public mind and endangering public prosperity.' Again, on the same occasion, 'He was for reforming every insti-

tution that really required reform; but he was for doing it gradually, dispassionately, and deliberately, in order that the reform might be lasting.'" Such was the altered spirit in which Peel resolved to deal with the situation created by the passing of the Reform Act. In his own mind perhaps there was no change. So far as toryism meant, as it certainly meant for some minds, the domination of a caste, the maintenance of exclusive privilege, and a blind resistance to all change, he was never a Tory. From the passing of the Reform Act he was not much more than half a Conservative; before he died he was a good deal more than half a Liberal.

No attempt will be made here to write the history of the Grey Administration in the first reformed Parliament. A leader of Opposition has little influence in shaping the measures and controlling the policy of a powerful Government. Especially is this the case when the Government is inspired by a great popular impulse and fortified by a determined expression of the national will. The reformed Parliament had a great mission to accomplish. The eight years which followed the settlement of 1832 were a period of vast activity in legislation. It was in that period that the institutions and policy of the country were recast in conformity with the impulses and ideas which had taken hold of the national mind and struggled for political expression for more than a generation. But even now when the citadel of caste and privilege had been stormed and carried, when the middle class seemed at last to have come by its own, there still remained a formidable obstacle to the fruition and consolidation of its power. That obstacle was Ireland. The condition of Ireland engaged nearly all of the

attention and energies of Parliament during the sessions of 1833 and 1834, and the political history of the time resolves itself into a duel between O'Connell and the Administration. Peel, for the most part, stood aloof from the contest. He lent on occasion valuable aid to the Government, as when in 1833 he warmly supported Stanley, the Irish Secretary, against the attacks of O'Connell and the Radicals, and when in 1834 he resisted O'Connell's motion for an inquiry into the Act of Union in a speech against repeal which is still remembered as one of his happiest and most eloquent efforts. But as a shrewd and vigilant leader of opposition Peel could not but perceive that the Irish difficulty must in the end lead to the overthrow of the Whigs. His patriotism forbade him to take a factious course or to tamper with the principles of law and order for the sake of a parliamentary advantage. But it did not and could not forbid him to bide his time, to dissociate himself from the blunders of the Government, and to make himself the rallying-point of those forces of natural conservatism which were evoked by the spectacle of a distracted Administration and a party divided against itself. For the rest, such was the pressure of Irish affairs, that only two great measures of general policy were carried by the Government of Lord Grey. Of these the first was the Act for the Emancipation of Slaves passed in 1833, and the second the Act for the Amendment of the Poor Law, commonly called the New Poor Law, which was passed in 1834. To both these measures Peel gave his support. But he took no very active or prominent part in their discussion.

The condition of Ireland had attracted little attention

in England during the height of the reform struggle. But in the beginning of 1833 it was found to be almost desperate. The tithe question was the difficulty of the moment. But this was only a symptom; the real disease was organic. The Government found itself compelled to take extreme measures for the maintenance of law and order, and at the same time it endeavoured to mitigate the most palpable and prominent of Irish grievances by a measure dealing with the Temporalities of the Irish Church. But in both cases the Cabinet was divided against itself. Stanley would be content with nothing short of a Coercion Act more severe in its provisions than any which had been passed since the Union, and he would not hear of such a reform of the Irish Church as would satisfy Lord John Russell and the more stalwart of the Whigs. As Stanley was indispensable to the Ministry he had his way in both respects. But the dissensions of the Cabinet were very nearly fatal to its existence, and the Irish policy of Lord Grey in 1833 was the direct cause of his overthrow in 1834. An attempt was made to deal with the tithe difficulty in 1832, but it was only a palliative, and it was not until 1838, after successive ministries had tried their hand and failed, that the Tithe Commutation Act was finally passed by the Government of Lord Melbourne. In 1833 Stanley, as has been said, demanded a drastic Coercion Act. His demand was reluctantly conceded by his colleagues, but they insisted at the same time that an attempt should be made to abate the grievances of the Irish Protestant Establishment. The Coercion Act was passed, but the Church Temporalities Act was mutilated in the House of Lords and shorn even in the

House of Commons of the "appropriation clause"—a provision, that is, for the application of the surplus revenues of the Church to secular purposes—which constituted its main recommendation in the eyes of the English Radicals and the Irish followers of O'Connell. This clause was abandoned at the instance of Stanley, whose subsequent course showed that it could never have had his approval.

The influence of Stanley was equally dominant in the treatment of the Coercion Act. A section of the Cabinet to which Althorp belonged thought the Bill far too severe, and the measure was very nearly wrecked on its first introduction into the House of Commons by what Lord John Russell afterwards called the "tame and ineffective" advocacy of Althorp. Stanley retrieved its fortunes, however, in a speech which was one of his greatest parliamentary triumphs. It was the course of this memorable debate which enabled Peel to gauge the character of the reformed House of Commons. His estimate was not altogether favourable, nor was his forecast sanguine. "Now for the House of Commons," he wrote to Croker on 5th March 1833. "It is a good one to speak to, but that circumstance does not diminish my fear of it. It is not the suggestion of confidence and vanity, but it is sober truth, when I tell you that on Friday night I could have moved it just the other way. Perhaps not Friday night but on Wednesday night, if I had chosen to follow Lord Althorp . . . . if I had followed him, given an account of English crimes within the same period, and asked—as Perceval once asked of an excited House of Commons, in the language of true eloquence, 'Will you hang a dog upon such evi-

dence?'—I could have trampled the Bill to dust. What does this show? That there is no steadiness in the House, that it is subject to any impulse, that the force of party connections, by which alone a Government can pursue a consistent course, is quite paralysed. Three times already, with reference to three different measures, the Government has said, in the most childish manner, that if not passed they intend to resign. My belief is, that the Reform Bill has worked for three weeks solely from this, that the Conservatives have been too honest to unite with the Radicals. They might have united ten times without a sacrifice of principle. They might unite on twenty clauses of the Irish Bill. And what is to happen then? The question is not, Can you turn out a Government? but, Can you keep in any Government and stave off confusion? . . . What are we doing at this moment? We are making the Reform Bill work; we are falsifying our own predictions, which would be realised without our active interference; we are protecting the authors of the evil from the work of their own hands. It is right we should do this, but I must say that it was expecting more than human institutions, intended to govern the unruly passions and corrupt natures of human beings, ought to calculate upon."

Such was Peel's estimate of the political situation in 1833. By a coalition with the Radicals he could have defeated the Government, but he could not have taken their place. The time was not yet ripe. The Tory party had not yet been transformed into a Conservative party, and there was no real affinity or cohesion between the Tories and the Radicals. Even in 1834 though the Whigs were weaker, though the party led by Lord Grey

was manifestly falling to pieces, the Conservatives were not yet strong enough to stand alone, and if Peel could have controlled events he would certainly have shrunk from assuming the responsibility which, as we shall shortly see, was unexpectedly thrust upon him by the precipitate action of the King.

The internal dissensions which had weakened the Grey Government in 1833 caused its disruption in 1834. Stanley had relinquished the Irish Secretaryship after the passing of the Coercion Act and had become Secretary of State for the Colonies. In the spring of 1834, however, he resigned, together with Sir James Graham, the Duke of Richmond, and Lord Ripon, on account of a difference with his colleagues concerning the appropriation of the surplus revenues of the Irish Church. Later in the session Grey himself resigned in disgust at an intrigue carried on behind his back by Brougham and others concerning the renewal of the Coercion Act. He had previously warned Althorp of his intention, and complained bitterly of the dissensions of his colleagues and their disloyalty towards himself. His resignation broke up his Cabinet. Melbourne was commissioned by the king to form a new Government and instructed to "enter into communication with the leading individuals of parties, and to endeavour at this crisis to prevail upon them to afford their aid and co-operation towards the formation of an administration upon an enlarged basis, combining the services of the most able and efficient members of each." Wellington, Peel, and Stanley, were specifically mentioned as the statesmen to whom appeal should be made. Melbourne, though well aware that the attempt was hopeless, consented so far to

humour his royal master as to write to Peel on the subject, and both statesmen hastened to assure the king that in the existing state of politics and parties the proposed coalition was impossible. Ultimately Althorp was persuaded to withdraw his resignation, and the crisis was ended by the substitution of Melbourne for Grey as Prime Minister. The Coercion Act was now modified in the sense to which Grey had objected, and a fresh attempt to settle the tithe question was frustrated by the House of Lords, which threw out the Bill. The Reform Ministry was evidently tottering to its fall. Another session would probably put an end to it, and Peel might look forward with some confidence to a dissolution which would restore the Conservative party to power.

The normal evolution of party relations was, however, disturbed by an accidental and unexpected event. In November 1834, Earl Spencer, the father of Lord Althorp, died, and the consequent elevation of the latter to the Upper House deprived the House of Commons of its leader and the Whig party of its mainstay. Melbourne at once wrote to the king offering either to reconstruct the Ministry, or to retire from office, as the king might think best, and a day or two later he waited upon the king at Brighton to discuss the situation and take the royal commands. At the interview at Brighton the whole situation was exhaustively and confidentially discussed, but no hint was given by the king of his intention to accept the minister's half-proffered resignation. It is probable that Melbourne in referring to the contingency of the king's seeking other advice was thinking rather of the new Lord Spencer being invited to become Prime Minister than of the dismissal of the

Whigs and the recall of the Tories to power. However this may be, nothing was settled at the first interview; but on the following morning the king handed Melbourne a memorandum in which he bluntly announced that the minister's services would be dispensed with.

Melbourne received his abrupt but not unwelcome dismissal with dignified reserve. He took leave of the king, and returned to London to announce his dismissal to his colleagues. With a maladroitness which must have tickled the whimsical humour of the retiring minister, the king made him the bearer of a summons to the statesman designated as his successor. Much has been written about this celebrated transaction, which is generally represented as an undue straining of the constitutional powers of the sovereign. The truth is that mistakes were made on both sides, and that Melbourne and the king unconsciously helped to elucidate a doctrine of the constitution which, previously indeterminate, was determined once for all by the transaction of 1834. The modern doctrine is that ministers only resign when they have forfeited the confidence of the House of Commons. In default of a direct expression of opinion by the House they are themselves the judges of the obligation imposed upon them. The result in this case showed that the withdrawal of Lord Althorp had not deprived the Whigs of the confidence of the House of Commons nor materially impaired their authority in the country. Melbourne was therefore wrong in tendering his conditional resignation. He should have made no conditions and offered no alternative. He should either have declared his readiness to reconstruct his Ministry and await the judgment of Parliament, or have frankly acknowledged

his inability to carry on the Government. The king was equally wrong to accept a resignation so tendered. He accepted a responsibility which properly belonged to his ministers, and the result showed that he exercised it with deplorable lack of judgment. But the main effect of his action was to defeat his own purpose by restoring the waning popularity of the Whigs, who are never so strong as when they are engaged in a conflict with the Crown, and to make it impossible for a sovereign to act in future as he had done.

Wellington forthwith obeyed the royal summons conveyed to him through Melbourne. He at once agreed on behalf of his party to form a Government subject to the approval and co-operation of Peel, whom he recommended for the office of Prime Minister. Peel himself was out of England. So little did he anticipate a crisis, that he had gone with his family to spend the winter in Italy, and was supposed to be in Rome. But a few months previously, on the occasion of the abortive negotiations which Melbourne at the king's bidding had opened with him, he had agreed with Wellington, as he himself records, that they would both "afford the king every assistance in their power, if his majesty should require that assistance, without conditions as to union with others of different political principles and party connections, and giving us full liberty to exercise our discretion in respect to dissolution and public measures generally." Hence Wellington had no hesitation in tendering his services to the king, but he recommended his majesty to choose a minister in the House of Commons, and advised that Peel should be the minister chosen. To this the king readily assented, and Wel-

lington agreed that Peel should be summoned to return at once from the Continent, and that he himself should in the meantime hold the offices of First Lord of the Treasury and Secretary of State for the Home Department—a single Secretary of State being constitutionally empowered to act in the name of all the others—"in order," as the king put it in his letter to Peel, "to hold the Government till the return of Sir Robert Peel." The Great Seal was at the same time put in commission, Lyndhurst being named First Commissioner.

It was necessary to find Peel, his exact whereabouts being unknown in England. A young man named James Hudson who was at that time Gentleman Usher to the queen, and was afterwards well known throughout Europe as Sir James Hudson—*quel uomo Italianissimo*, as Cavour called him, who was British Minister at Turin during the crisis of Italian independence—was entrusted with letters to Peel from the king and the duke, and instructed to find Peel and deliver them with all despatch. Travelling hard and fast, as speed was reckoned in those days, in nine days Hudson was at Rome, where he had ascertained that Peel was still staying. Peel received him coldly and formally, and having read the letters and ascertained the nature of Hudson's mission, he asked what day he had left England and what hour he had reached Rome. "I think," he said, with characteristic ungraciousness, "you might have made the journey in a day less, by taking another route." This was on 25th November. Peel left Rome the next day, and reached London early on 9th December. He waited on the king at once, and unhesitatingly accepted the office of First Lord of the

Treasury, agreeing at the same time with the king that in the formation of his Cabinet an attempt should be made to secure the co-operation of Stanley and Graham, who having seceded from the Whigs a few months previously, were slowly gravitating towards the Conservative side. These overtures were declined, however, both statesmen feeling that their secession from the Government of Lord Grey had been so recent, that they could not join a Government formed by Lord Grey's leading opponents without grave loss of public character. They assured Peel, nevertheless, of their high personal esteem and their desire to afford him an independent support. The Government was accordingly formed from the regular Tory and Conservative Opposition, though it was not altogether a reproduction of the Wellington Cabinet of 1830. "My duty," writes Peel, "was to make the Government as strong and efficient as I could; and after the refusal of office by Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham, I continued to act as well as I could on the principle which had dictated the offer to them, and invited into the service of the Crown such men of Conservative principles as appeared most likely either to strengthen the Government by their talent or to conciliate support to it on account of their political connections. The mere re-establishment of the Duke of Wellington's Government of 1830 would have saved me much trouble, but would have diminished the little hope I ever entertained of being enabled to make a successful struggle." Peel himself became Chancellor of the Exchequer as well as Prime Minister; Wellington, Foreign Secretary; Lyndhurst, Lord Chancellor; Lord Aberdeen, Secretary for War and the Colonies, Goulburn,

Home Secretary, and Sir Henry Hardinge, Chief Secretary for Ireland. Mr. Gladstone, who had been returned for Parliament on the passing of the Reform Bill as member for Newark, now first took office as one of the junior Lords of the Treasury, being transferred a short time later to the Under-Secretaryship for the Colonies, the office in which Peel himself had first entered the service of the Crown.

Much indignation and ridicule were spent upon Wellington for his assumption of all the principal offices of State while awaiting Peel's return from the Continent. But these recriminations hardly belong to history. They are merely a part of the conventional cut and thrust of party conflict. Certainly, if the arrangement had been other than provisional, it would have been unconstitutional. If the minister had been any other than Wellington, it would have been inexpedient. Peel's difficulties were not seriously increased by having to defend it; it evoked much public criticism, but it did not incur Parliamentary censure, and the duke himself successfully vindicated his conduct and demonstrated the purely provisional character of the arrangement by stating in the House of Lords "that during the whole time he held the seals there was not a single office disposed of nor an act done which was not essentially necessary for the service of the king and of the country." Peel's real difficulties were of another kind. He was suddenly called to office without having been a party to the transactions which led to the summons. He had laboured to reconstruct his party on lines determined by the constitutional changes effected in 1832. His work was far from complete. The time was not yet ripe, as

the event showed, for a coalition with those more moderate Whigs, represented by Stanley and Graham, who had parted company with the Ministry of Lord Grey. In his hurried journey from Rome he reviewed the whole situation, as he tells us, "coolly and without interruption." It was not without hesitation that he resolved by accepting office to make himself morally and constitutionally responsible for the dissolution of the preceding Government, in which he personally had not had the remotest concern. "I greatly doubted indeed the policy of breaking up the Government of Lord Melbourne. I entertained little hope that the Ministry about to replace it would be a stable one—would command such a majority as would enable it to transact the public business. . . . If change under the then existing circumstances were desirable at all, it appeared to me more likely to lead to a satisfactory and permanent result if it should take place in consequence of dissensions among members of Lord Melbourne's Government, or quarrels between the Government and its supporters, or in short from any cause rather than the direct intervention of the king, except of course in the case of some event manifestly justifying such intervention, and ensuring for the act of the sovereign very general support and approbation through the country."

Nevertheless, the direct intervention of the king, whereby Melbourne had been dismissed and Wellington summoned to office, left Peel no alternative. All might have gone well with him if Stanley and Graham had consented to join him. But here the precipitancy of the king and the promptitude of the duke created an insuperable obstacle by rendering the immediate adhesion

of Stanley and Graham impossible. Perhaps Stanley thought, as many well-informed politicians believed at the time, and as Peel hints in a letter to Croker, that the evolution of events might make him the head of the moderate party which Peel was endeavouring to form. If so, his calculations were frustrated by the general election, which showed that he had no appreciable following in the country. He willingly accepted office under Peel in 1841; and there can be little doubt that had Melbourne's Government, instead of being summarily dismissed been allowed to fall in the fulness of time by its own inherent weakness and through the withdrawal of the country's confidence, the reluctance of Stanley, Graham, and others, to throw in their lot with the reconstructed Conservative party would not have been insuperable.

Their refusal to join Peel threw the minister back in the main on what, as Croker tells us, he querulously called "the duke's old Cabinet." The changes for which he took credit in a passage in his *Memoirs*, already quoted, were not very considerable, and the new Ministry was anything but strong in its personal constitution. The new Premier determined to dissolve Parliament at once. The state of affairs which he found on his return to England left him no alternative. He could hardly ask members of the House of Commons to join his Cabinet and thereby vacate their seats with the further prospect before them of a dissolution, which would almost certainly occur early in the ensuing session in consequence of a hostile vote of the House of Commons. Accordingly, as soon as his Cabinet was complete, he prepared and submitted to his colleagues an address to

his constituents at Tamworth, which was intended to declare the general principles on which the Government proposed to act, and to indicate to his followers the plan of campaign to be pursued in the forthcoming general election. This memorable address has ever since been known in history as the Tamworth Manifesto. It gave some offence and caused some alarm to old-fashioned Tories at the time of its appearance, but it soon became and long remained the charter of the Conservative party. Its importance in relation alike to the personal history of Peel and the political history of his time is so immense and so unique that no excuse is needed for giving it here in full. It may fitly close a chapter in which Peel's course has been traced from the overthrow of the party to which he never belonged in spirit, to the rise of a new party created and inspired by his own genius and to his own appointment as First Minister of the Crown :—

To the Electors of the Borough of Tamworth.

Gentlemen—On the 26th of November last, being then at Rome, I received from his majesty a summons, wholly unforeseen and unexpected by me, to return to England without delay, for the purpose of assisting his majesty in the formation of a new Government. I instantly obeyed the command for my return ; and on my arrival, I did not hesitate, after an anxious review of the position of public affairs, to place at the disposal of my sovereign any services which I might be thought capable of rendering.

My acceptance of the first office in the Government terminates, for the present, my political connection with you. In seeking the renewal of it, whenever you shall be called upon to perform the duty of electing a representative in Parliament, I feel it incumbent upon me to enter into a

declaration of my views of public policy, as full and unreserved as I can make it, consistently with my duty as a minister of the Crown.

You are entitled to this, from the nature of the trust which I again solicit, from the long habits of friendly intercourse in which we have lived, and from your tried adherence to me in times of difficulty, when the demonstration of unabated confidence was of peculiar value. I gladly avail myself also of this, a legitimate opportunity, of making a more public appeal—of addressing, through you, to that great and intelligent class of society of which you are a portion, and a fair and unexceptionable representative—to that class which is much less interested in the contentions of party than in the maintenance of order and the cause of good government, that frank exposition of general principles and views which appears to be anxiously expected, and which it ought not to be the inclination, and cannot be the interest, of a minister of this country to withhold.

"Gentlemen, the arduous duties in which I am engaged have been imposed upon me through no act of mine. Whether they were an object of ambition coveted by me—whether I regard the power and distinction they confer as any sufficient compensation for the heavy sacrifices they involve—are matters of mere personal concern, on which I will not waste a word. The king, in a crisis of great difficulty, required my services. The question I had to decide was this—Shall I obey the call? or shall I shrink from the responsibility, alleging as the reason, that I consider myself, in consequence of the Reform Bill, as labouring under a sort of moral disqualification, which must preclude me, and all who think with me, both now and for ever, from entering into the official service of the Crown? Would it, I ask, be becoming in any public man to act upon such a principle? Was it fit that I should assume that either the object or the effect of the Reform Bill has been to preclude all hope of a successful appeal to the good sense and calm judgment of the people, and so to fetter the prerogative of the Crown, that the king has no free choice among his subjects, but must select his ministers from one section, and one section only, of public men?

I have taken another course, but I have not taken it

without deep and anxious consideration as to the probability that my opinions are so far in unison with those of the constituent body of the United Kingdom as to enable me, and those with whom I am about to act, and whose sentiments are in entire concurrence with my own, to establish such a claim upon public confidence as shall enable us to conduct with vigour and success the Government of this country.

I have the firmest conviction that that confidence cannot be secured by any other course than that of a frank and explicit declaration of principle; that vague and unmeaning professions of popular opinions may quiet distrust for a time, may influence this or that election; but that such professions must ultimately and signally fail, if, being made, they are not adhered to, or if they are inconsistent with the honour and character of those who make them.

Now I say at once that I will not accept power on the condition of declaring myself an apostate from the principles on which I have heretofore acted. At the same time, I never will admit that I have been, either before or after the Reform Bill, the defender of abuses, or the enemy of judicious reforms. I appeal with confidence, in denial of the charge, to the active part I took in the great question of the Currency—in the consolidation and amendment of the Criminal Law—in the revisal of the whole system of Trial by Jury—to the opinions I have professed, and uniformly acted on, with regard to other branches of the jurisprudence of the country. I appeal to this as a proof that I have not been disposed to acquiesce in acknowledged evils, either from the mere superstitious reverence for ancient usages, or from the dread of labour or responsibility in the application of a remedy.

But the Reform Bill, it is said, constitutes a new era, and it is the duty of a minister to declare explicitly—first, whether he will maintain the Bill itself, and, secondly, whether he will act upon the spirit in which it was conceived.

With respect to the Reform Bill itself, I will repeat now the declaration which I made when I entered the House of Commons as a member of the reformed Parliament, that I consider the Reform Bill a final and irrevocable settle-

ment of a great constitutional question—a settlement which no friend to the peace and welfare of this country would attempt to disturb, either by direct or by insidious means.

Then, as to the spirit of the Reform Bill, and the willingness to adopt and enforce it as a rule of Government; if, by adopting the spirit of the Reform Bill, it be meant that we are to live in a perpetual vortex of agitation; that public men can only support themselves in public estimation by adopting every popular impression of the day,—by promising the instant redress of any thing which anybody may call an abuse,—by abandoning altogether that great aid of Government—more powerful than either law or reason—the respect for ancient rights, and the deference to prescriptive authority; if this be the spirit of the Reform Bill, I will not undertake to adopt it. But if the spirit of the Reform Bill implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper, combining, with the firm maintenance of established rights, the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances—in that case, I can for myself and colleagues undertake to act in such a spirit and with such intentions.

Such declarations of general principle are, I am aware, necessarily vague; but, in order to be more explicit, I will endeavour to apply them practically to some of those questions which have of late attracted the greater share of public interest and attention.

I take, first, the inquiry into Municipal Corporations:

It is not my intention to advise the Crown to interrupt the progress of that inquiry, nor to transfer the conduct of it from those to whom it was committed by the late Government. For myself, I gave the best proof that I was not unfriendly to the principle of inquiry, by consenting to be a member of that Committee of the House of Commons on which it was originally devolved. No report has yet been made by the Commissioners to whom the inquiry was afterwards referred; and, until that report be made, I cannot be expected to give, on the part of the Government, any other pledge than they will bestow on the suggestions it may contain, and the evidence on which they may be founded, a full and unprejudiced consideration.

I will, in the next place, address myself to the questions in which those of our fellow-countrymen who dissent from the doctrines of the Established Church take an especial interest.

Instead of making new professions, I will refer to the course which I took upon those subjects when out of power.

In the first place, I supported the measure brought forward by Lord Althorp, the object of which was to exempt all classes from the payment of Church rates, applying in lieu thereof, out of a branch of the revenue, a certain sum for the building and repair of churches. I never expressed, nor did I entertain, the slightest objection to the principle of a Bill of which Lord John Russell was the author, intended to relieve the conscientious scruples of Dissenters in respect to the ceremony of marriage. I give no opinion now on the particular measures themselves: they were proposed by ministers in whom the Dissenters had confidence; they were intended to give relief; and it is sufficient for my present purpose to state that I supported the principle of them.

I opposed—and I am bound to state that my opinions in that respect have undergone no change—the admission of Dissenters, as a claim of right, into the Universities; but I expressly declared that if regulations enforced by public authorities superintending the professions of law and medicine, and the studies connected with them, had the effect of conferring advantages of the nature of civil privileges on one class of the king's subjects from which another was excluded—those regulations ought to undergo modification, with the view of placing all the king's subjects, whatever their religious creeds, upon a footing of perfect equality with respect to any civil privilege.

I appeal to the course which I pursued on those several questions when office must have been out of contemplation, and I ask with confidence, does that course imply that I was actuated by any illiberal or intolerant spirit towards the Dissenting body, or by an unwillingness to consider fairly the redress of any real grievances?

In the examination of other questions which excited

public feeling I will not omit the Pension List. I resisted —and, with the opinions I entertain, I should again resist— a retrospective inquiry into pensions granted by the Crown at a time when the discretion of the Crown was neither fettered by law nor by the expression of any opinion on the part of the House of Commons; but I voted for the resolution, moved by Lord Althorp, that pensions on the Civil List ought, for the future, to be confined to such persons only as have just claims to the royal beneficence, or are entitled to consideration on account either of their personal services to the Crown or of the performance of duties to the public, or of their scientific or literary eminence. On the resolution which I thus supported as a private member of Parliament I shall scrupulously act as a Minister of the Crown, and shall advise the grant of no pension which is not in conformity with the spirit and intention of the vote to which I was a party.

Then as to the great question of Church Reform. On that head I have no new professions to make. I cannot give my consent to the alienating of Church property, in any part of the United Kingdom, from strictly ecclesiastical purposes. But I repeat now the opinions that I have already expressed in Parliament in regard to the Church Establishment in Ireland—that if, by an improved distribution of the revenues of the Church, its just influence can be extended and the true interests of the Established religion promoted, all other considerations should be made subordinate to the advancement of objects of such paramount importance.

As to Church property in this country, no person has expressed a more earnest wish than I have done that the question of tithe, complicated and difficult as I acknowledge it to be, should, if possible, be satisfactorily settled by the means of a commutation, founded upon just principles, and proposed after mature consideration.

With regard to alterations in the laws which govern our Ecclesiastical Establishment, I have had no recent opportunity of giving that grave consideration to a subject of the deepest interest which could alone justify me in making any public declaration of opinion. It is a subject which must undergo

the fullest deliberation, and into that deliberation the Government will enter, with the sincerest desire to remove every abuse that can impair the efficiency of the Establishment, to extend the sphere of its usefulness, and to strengthen and confirm its just claims upon the respect and affections of the people.

It is unnecessary for my purpose to enter into further details. I have said enough, with respect to general principles and their practical application to public measures, to indicate the spirit in which the king's Government is prepared to act. Our object will be—the maintenance of peace—the scrupulous and honourable fulfilment, without reference to their original policy, of all existing engagements with foreign Powers—the support of public credit—the enforcement of strict economy—and the just and impartial consideration of what is due to all interests—agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial.

Whatever may be the issue of the undertaking in which I am engaged, I feel assured that you will mark, by a renewal of your confidence, your approbation of the course I have pursued in accepting office. I enter upon the arduous duties assigned to me with the deepest sense of the responsibility they involve, with great distrust of my own qualifications for their adequate discharge, but at the same time with a resolution to persevere which nothing could inspire but the strong impulse of public duty, the consciousness of upright motives, and the firm belief that the people of this country will so far maintain the prerogative of the king as to give to the ministers of his choice, not an implicit confidence, but a fair trial.—I am, gentlemen, with affectionate regard, most faithfully yours, ROBERT PEEL.

CHAPTER VII

FOUR MONTHS OF OFFICE, AND SIX YEARS OF OPPOSITION

1835–1841

THE Parliament of 1832 was dissolved at the close of 1834, and its successor was summoned to meet in February 1835. As a matter of policy it might have been wiser, as Lord John Russell thought in after years, for the new Ministry to meet the old Parliament, and not to appeal to the country until they had been defeated in the House of Commons. But, as we have seen in the last chapter, Peel had practically no alternative. A second dissolution was constitutionally open to him, and when challenged on the point during the debate on the Address by Lord John Russell, who became the leader of the Opposition, he declared that while it would be unbecoming in him to fetter the discussions of the House of Commons by the slightest menace of contingent dissolution, it would be equally unbecoming to consent to place in abeyance any prerogative of the Crown, or to debar himself by previous pledges from giving to the Crown that advice which future exigencies of the public service might require.

The contingency never arose, however. The Conservative party was strengthened in the elections by large gains in the county constituencies, but the boroughs still remained faithful to the party of reform. In Great Britain parties were very evenly balanced, but with the aid of O'Connell and his supporters from Ireland the Whigs could count on a majority. It was this which determined the issue of the political struggles of 1835. O'Connell was deeply incensed with the Whigs, and had frequently assailed Lord Grey with outrageous vituperation. But he was not irreconcilable, and the political history of the next six years is the history of his alliance with the Whigs.

The political situation at the beginning of 1835 is one which repays attentive study. Parties were in confusion, and the constitution itself was in process of gradual and uneasy adaptation to the changes effected in 1832. The king had blundered in dismissing Lord Melbourne. He thought he could act as his father had more than once acted, and choose a Ministry to his liking. But the times had changed, and William IV had not even the statecraft of George III. A mere accident rendered the blunder irreparable. Peel being absent from England, could exercise no effective control over the king's untoward precipitancy, and he found on his return that the military promptitude of Wellington had left him no choice but to become Prime Minister. His discretion in advising a dissolution was equally fettered. Had he been in England when Melbourne was dismissed and the duke summoned, he might have endeavoured, as Lord John Russell endeavoured on the occasion of Peel's own resignation in 1845, to obtain some pledges

from his opponents before consenting to take office. With such pledges he might have met the existing Parliament, and have chosen his own time for a dissolution. Without them he would probably have informed the king that he could not undertake the Government, and have recommended him to recall Lord Melbourne. On his return to England, however, he found matters already in such a train that it was impossible for him to recede, and equally impossible for him to postpone a dissolution. Hence his position was altogether different from that occupied by Pitt in 1784, to which it has sometimes been compared. Not only had the reform of Parliament transferred the centre of political gravity from the upper House to the lower, but Pitt held a dissolution in reserve, while Peel had already employed that weapon when he found himself confronted with a hostile and exasperated majority. The Opposition indeed was neither homogeneous nor organically coherent; it was united only in the determination to make Peel suffer for the humiliation inflicted on the Whigs by the king. It consisted of the Whigs proper, who differed in little more than name and party connection from the more moderate and progressive of the Conservatives, including Peel himself; of the Radicals, who were distrusted in the country and discredited in the House of Commons, and apart from the Whigs were incapable of standing alone; and of the followers of O'Connell, whose whole policy was based on the fact that his support was indispensable to the recovery of power by the Whigs. On the other hand, the supporters of Peel were almost equally divided. The old Tory party, whose strength lay in the House

of Lords, still distrusted him and constantly thwarted his own more liberal impulses; while the new Conservatives, imperfectly appreciating their own strength, exaggerated the differences between themselves and the moderate Whigs. Stanley, with a few personal supporters—the occupants of the "Derby Dilly," to recall the phrase happily borrowed by O'Connell from the *Anti-Jacobin*,—stood for a time between the opposing parties, and might perhaps have secured Peel's triumph if he had frankly espoused his cause. But his statesmanship was unequal to the task.

A section of the Whigs, whose views were represented by Lord Howick in the House of Commons, would have been unwilling to join in the final assault which overthrew Peel if Peel's Government had been originally so constituted, or could have been so reconstructed, as to hold out the prospect of a liberal policy in the treatment of the Irish Church. But no assistance could be expected in this direction from Stanley, who had seceded from the Whigs on this very question, while the Tories in the House of Lords, who ultimately defeated the Whigs over the appropriation clause, made it impossible for Peel even to contemplate such concessions as would have satisfied Lord Howick and his friends. Thus the situation on every side was one of almost unexampled perplexity. Peel was not his own master either in taking office or in shaping his policy. Any step which he took in a liberal direction would alienate his own Tory followers without conciliating the Whigs, who were still chafing under their treatment by the king in the autumn. On the other hand, the shrewdest observers of the time were convinced that the Whigs themselves could not per-

manently resume office, though they might make it impossible for Peel to carry on the Government. Those who thought thus were wrong, as the event proved, and the reason is that they did not sufficiently appreciate the effect of the king's maladroit and inopportune interference with the natural evolution of events. A year or two later the Whig Government, disintegrated by inherent weakness and intestine dissension, would have fallen to pieces, and the new Conservative party, consolidated by Peel and reinforced by Stanley, would have entered upon its natural inheritance. All that William IV accomplished by dismissing Melbourne was to throw the Whigs into the arms of O'Connell and the Radicals, and to compel Peel to fall back for a time on the antiquated and reactionary toryism of the House of Lords. The results may be traced in the whole subsequent course of English politics down to the present day.

Peel, though the dissolution had not procured him a majority, determined to meet the Parliament he had summoned and to strive by statesmanship to establish and maintain his position. He knew that the Opposition would not spare him, but he was resolved to defy it as long as he could. It might be that the wisdom of his measures and the moderation of his policy would so far influence public opinion as to paralyse the narrow majority of the Whigs, and could he have approached Irish questions in the broad and liberal spirit which governed his general policy this would undoubtedly have been the case. But Ireland was the difficulty of both parties, and to both the difficulty proved insuperable. Hence Peel was overthrown and the Whigs

recovered office and retained it for six years. Power they did not recover, that is, power to carry out the policy to which they were committed. Their measures were constantly thwarted and rejected by the House of Lords, and Lord Melbourne's second Administration was one of the weakest administrations that ever held office in England.

The Parliament had no sooner met than Peel was made to understand the temper of the Opposition. The first contest was over the election of Speaker. Manners Sutton, the former Speaker, who though a Tory had been chosen by the Whigs to preside over the reformed House of Commons, was willing to serve again. Peel proposed him for the office. But the Whigs were now exasperated against him, alleging that he had taken a prominent part in the formation of the new Ministry, and that he had shown his partisanship in various ways, and they proposed Abercromby, the member for Edinburgh, in opposition to him. Manners Sutton defended himself not unsuccessfully against the charges of undue partisanship, but the Whigs were not to be appeased, and Abercromby was elected by 316 votes to 306. Manners Sutton was forthwith raised to the House of Lords with the title of Lord Canterbury. The result of the contest showed that Peel had no majority, but he determined nevertheless to proceed with the business of the session and to force the Opposition to take the responsibility of making his continuance in office impossible. The king's Speech was a sort of official version of the Tamworth Manifesto. After the customary references to the state of foreign affairs, the condition of the revenue, and the character of the

estimates to be submitted to the House of Commons, it called attention to the great depression which affected the agricultural interest, and recommended the House of Commons to consider the possibility of devising a method "for mitigating the pressure of those local burdens which bear heavily on the owners and occupiers of land, and for distributing the burden of them more equally over other descriptions of property." It then specified the chief subjects of legislation to be proposed. The first place was assigned to the urgent but perplexing question of tithe in Ireland. Measures were also announced "to promote the commutation of tithe in England and Wales, to improve our civil jurisprudence and the administration of justice in ecclesiastical causes, to make provision for the more effectual maintenance of ecclesiastical discipline, and to relieve those who dissent from the doctrines or discipline of the Church from the necessity of celebrating the ceremony of marriage according to its rites." A Royal Commission had been appointed in the previous session to inquire into the state of the municipal corporations, but as its report had not been received, the consideration of the subject was postponed. The Speech also announced the appointment of an Ecclesiastical Commission for England and Wales. "The especial object which I have in view," said the Speech, "in the appointment of this Commission is, to extend more widely the means of religious worship according to the doctrines of the Established Church, and to confirm its hold upon the veneration and affection of my people." The Speech further suggested that similar treatment might with advantage be applied to the Church of Scotland, and concluded in the spirit of the Tamworth

Manifesto with a recommendation to Parliament to apply caution and circumspection "to the alteration of laws which affect very extensive and complicated interests, and are interwoven with ancient usages, to which the habits and feelings of my people have conformed."

In ordinary circumstances such a programme would have found acceptance with Parliament and the country. Peel hoped to detach the moderate and anti-Radical Whigs from the side of the Opposition and gradually to reconcile them to his own policy. What he said of Stanley in a letter to Croker written shortly after Stanley had refused to join him might well be applied in substance to many of his nominal opponents. "I should have thought that in such a crisis as that in which we are, almost unconsciously, living, a man might have made up his mind as to some definite course of action; that he might have ranged himself on one side or the other; that if he left his colleagues because they were *Destructives*, to use his own word . . . I should have thought, having been one of the main causes of the king's embarrassment, he might, on the highest and most courageous principles, have assisted in the king's defence. Mind what I now say to you. If he really entertains the principles he professes, he *shall* not be able to maintain them and oppose me." But it was not sufficient to detach Stanley and his slender following from the Whigs. Stanley, as a matter of fact, voted with Peel in most of the critical divisions which preceded the resignation of the latter, but notwithstanding his defection the Opposition retained a majority. The truth is, that the Whigs, regardless of consequences, were deter-

mined to settle accounts with the king and with the ministers who had made themselves responsible for his acts. Lord Morpeth moved an amendment to the Address in which the House of Commons was invited to express its regret that the progress of reform had "been interrupted and endangered by the unnecessary dissolution of a Parliament earnestly intent upon the vigorous prosecution of measures to which the wishes of the people were most anxiously and justly directed." This amendment was so framed as to enable members to vote for it who were not prepared to turn Peel out of office, and it was in the debate which ensued that Lord Howick took occasion to intimate that he and other Whigs, though not satisfied with Peel's attitude towards the Irish Church, nor with the constitution of his Government, did not support the amendment with a view to his immediate displacement. But whatever may have been Peel's personal disposition in regard to the Irish Church, he had no choice or discretion. The House of Lords stood in the way, and the Protestant feeling of the country supported it. Peel could only point to the measures he had promised and to the liberal character of his general policy. "I feel it to be my duty—" he said, "my first and paramount duty—to maintain the post which has been confided to me, and to stand by the trust which I did not seek, but which I could not decline. I call upon you not to condemn before you have heard. . . . I make great offers, which should not be lightly rejected. I offer you the prospect of continued peace—the restored confidence of powerful states that are willing to seize the opportunity of reducing great armies, and thus diminishing the chance of hostile collision. I offer

you reduced estimates, improvements in civil jurisprudence, reform of ecclesiastical law, the settlement of the tithe question in Ireland, the removal of any real abuse in the Church, the redress of those grievances of which the Dissenters have any just ground to complain. I offer you these specific measures, and I offer also to advance, soberly and cautiously, it is true, in the path of progressive improvement. I offer also the best chance that these things can be effected in willing concert with the other authorities of the State—thus restoring harmony, ensuring the maintenance, but not excluding the reform, where reform is really requisite, of ancient institutions."

Notwithstanding this statesmanlike appeal the amendment was carried by a majority of 309 to 302. Peel declined to consider the vote as a summons to resign, and in this he was undoubtedly justified alike by the tone of the debate and the condition of parties. It was still universally believed that the Whigs could not return to office with any prospect of permanence. The alliance with O'Connell—the result of what was known at the time as the "Lichfield House Compact"—was not yet finally concluded, and the condition of parties was such that without O'Connell's countenance and support the Whigs were powerless. An abortive attempt was next made by Joseph Hume on behalf of the Radical wing of the Opposition to limit the vote of supply to three months; but it was found impossible to persuade the Opposition as a whole to adopt this method of embarrassing Peel, and Hume's motion, of which notice had been given with Lord John Russell's sanction, was withdrawn. The tactical advantage thus gained by Peel was

shortly afterwards neutralised by a gratuitous blunder of his own. He allowed Wellington to nominate the Marquis of Londonderry, the younger brother of Castlereagh, as Ambassador to Russia. The appointment was intensely unpopular, and was universally regarded as ill-judged and indefensible. The name of Castlereagh was still odious, and Lord Londonderry was supposed to be identified with its worst traditions both in foreign and domestic policy. The Opposition declared its determination to resist the appointment, and even Stanley acknowledged that on such a question he could not support the Government. Peel was only saved from defeat by the voluntary withdrawal of Lord Londonderry from the post to which he had been nominated. His Government was discredited, and the Whigs enjoyed the satisfaction of virtually cancelling an appointment which the king had been ready to sanction.

Nevertheless Peel held his ground and proceeded with the introduction of the principal measures promised in the king's Speech. Within a fortnight the Ecclesiastical Courts Bill, the Dissenters' Marriage Bill, and resolutions dealing with Irish and English tithes were laid before the House of Commons, Peel himself undertaking the introduction of the Dissenters' Marriage Bill. These measures were well received by the country, and were conceived in a statesmanlike spirit. But the Opposition had now occupied the ground from which it could deliver a final and victorious assault on the Government. In his *Recollections and Suggestions* Lord John Russell has left the best and most authentic account of the conflict. "To turn the majority into a minority," he says, "by a direct vote of want of con-

fidence would have been easy. But my object was to keep the majority together, and in the whole twenty years during which I led the Liberal party in the House of Commons I never had so difficult a task. The plain and obvious plan of voting the supplies for three months being given up, the question naturally occurred, In what manner could Sir Robert Peel obtain that fair trial which his own partisans and many independent Whigs called for on his behalf? There appeared no question so well fitted for an *experimentum crucis* as the question of the Irish Church. The proposal for a Commission made by Lord Grey's Government had been considered by four of the leading members of the Cabinet as a test of principle, and the Liberal members of the first reformed House of Commons had accepted the question of the integrity and perpetual endowment of the Irish Church as marking the frontier-line between Liberal and Tory principles. I therefore proposed to bring forward a resolution which, on the one hand, would be supported by Lord Howick, and was, on the other, the basis of an alliance with O'Connell and the Irish members. Compact there was none, but an alliance on honourable terms of mutual co-operation undoubtedly existed."

Political literature may be searched far and wide for an apter illustration than this passage affords of the difference between statesmanship and the political strategy which makes and unmakes Governments. Had Lord John Russell and the Whigs been more intent on framing a policy which was capable of being realised for the good of the United Kingdom than on turning a majority into a minority—there was no majority, by the way—for the purpose of displacing Peel and morti-

fying the king, the political course of the next few years might have been more advantageous to the country and less discreditable to the Whigs. It is to be regretted that Peel was so inflexible on the subject of the Irish Church. A statesmanlike treatment of that question might have changed the whole history of Ireland and her relations to Great Britain. But the appropriation clause was a pretext and not a policy. It was used for the purpose of persuading O'Connell to suspend his demand for repeal and to support the policy of the Whigs. But it was more than the Whigs could carry, and less than they ought to have demanded. It is true that its proposal served its purpose of securing the support of Lord Howick, but this was, perhaps, because Lord Howick was convinced, at the time when the resolution embodying the principle of appropriation was moved, that there was no prospect of Peel's making such concessions as would satisfy him. He could hardly have regarded the resolution itself as affording an adequate basis of policy, since all the arguments that could be used in its favour would in reason have led to a far larger measure. To propose or demand a larger measure would have been more statesmanlike and more straightforward on the part of the Whigs, though less likely to effect their immediate purpose. Public opinion throughout the country was not even ripe for an appropriation clause, as the Whigs found to their cost. But it is not easy to commend their statesmanship in proposing so little, or to defend their levity in subsequently abandoning the little they had proposed.

O'Connell's record in this transaction is at any rate pure and honourable. He still remained, as Lord John

Russell says, the ardent advocate of repeal, but he consented for a time to withdraw the question from the region of practical politics. He gained nothing for himself, but he secured a period of comparative tranquillity for Ireland, notwithstanding the miscarriage of the legislation proposed by the Whigs. This period was turned to the best account by the genius of Thomas Drummond, who became Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant on the return of the Whigs to office. O'Connell loyally supported the Whigs until it became clear that they were powerless to give effect to their part of the understanding. When they fell it was not by his defection, but by their loss of popularity in England, a loss occasioned mainly by their incapacity in legislation and administration. "Nor did I ever see occasion," says Lord John Russell, "to complain of O'Connell's conduct. He confined his opposition fairly to Irish measures. He never countenanced the Canadian Catholics in their disaffection, nor promoted a recurrence to physical force, nor used trades' unions as a means of discord and separation among classes."

Another preliminary skirmish in which the Whigs were again successful preceded the final assault. Peel had endeavoured to meet some of the Nonconformists' grievances by his Dissenters' Marriage Bill. But the Whigs were prepared to go further. They could not hope to overcome the resistance of the House of Lords to a measure for the admission of Dissenters to Oxford and Cambridge. But they could and did press for the issue of a charter of incorporation conferring the right to grant degrees without sectarian restrictions upon the London University, at that time represented by

University College in Gower Street. Petitions for and against such a measure had been presented to Parliament in the previous session, and these had been referred on the recommendation of the late Government to a Committee of the Privy Council. Without waiting for the report of this committee, Tooke, the member for Truro, moved, with the support of the Opposition and its leaders, an address to the Crown, praying that the proposed charter might issue forthwith. In spite of Peel's remonstrances, the motion was carried by a majority of 246 to 136.

The division showed not only that the Opposition were determined and united, but that on side issues and on matters of less than primary importance Peel could not even muster the full strength of his own followers. Nevertheless, he still resolved not to resign, though he began to see that it was becoming more and more difficult for him to persevere in the task he had undertaken of conducting the Government of the country with a minority of the House of Commons. "Nothing," he wrote on 25th March in a Cabinet memorandum, "can in my opinion justify an administration in persevering against a majority but a rational and well-grounded hope of acquiring additional support and converting a minority into a majority. I see no ground for entertaining that hope; but I do see the greatest prejudice to the cause of good government, to the character of an administration, and of the public men who compose it, and to the prerogatives of the Crown, in a long-continued course, either of acquiescing in what you believe to be wrong, for fear of being in a minority, or of exhibiting the Executive Government without control over the

House of Commons, and attempting (after sufficient proof of their failure) to govern with a minority." These expressions of despondency were extorted from Peel by the tactics presented by the Opposition in regard to the Tithe Bill. Hardinge had obtained leave to introduce the Bill on 20th March, and had explained its provisions, which did not materially differ from those contained in the Bill which Littleton had introduced on behalf of the Whigs and the Tories had defeated in the previous year. The Whigs could not therefore defeat it directly. But the celebrated meetings at Lichfield House between O'Connell and the Whig leaders had by this time taken place, and had resulted in that "firm and compact alliance," as Shiel called it, which was known to partisans at the time as the "Lichfield House Compact." It accordingly became possible to consolidate the Opposition on the principle of appropriation, and on 30th March Lord John Russell moved, "That the House do resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House to consider the temporalities of the Irish Church." The debate on this resolution lasted for four nights, and in the division the ministers were defeated by a majority of 322 to 289. Stanley and Graham voted with Peel, but their followers were divided. Twelve voted with the Opposition and some few others absented themselves from the division. The "Derby Dilly" was upset; Stanley could not keep Peel in office and could not hold together a party of his own.

The division practically decided the fate of the Government. But Peel seems to have thought it expedient to force the leader of the Opposition still further to define his policy, and did not immediately

resign. On the following day, 3d April, Lord John Russell moved in Committee "That any surplus which may remain after fully providing for the spiritual instruction of the members of the Established Church in Ireland, ought to be applied locally, to the general education of all classes of Christians." This was carried by a majority of 262 to 237. A further application of the principle of appropriation was then insisted on by the leader of the Opposition, who invited the House to affirm that "no measure upon the subject of tithes in Ireland can lead to a satisfactory and final solution which does not embody the principle contained in the foregoing resolution." This was carried on 7th April by a majority of 285 to 258, and as it was fatal to the Tithe Bill, Peel at last resolved to give up the struggle. On the following morning he tendered his resignation to the king, and the same day he announced in the House of Commons that his ministry was at an end. The resignation was accepted, and after fruitless attempts on the part of the king to bring about a coalition of parties, and of the Whigs to persuade Lord Grey to return to office, Lord Melbourne once more became Prime Minister, with Lord Palmerston Foreign Secretary, and Lord John Russell Home Secretary and leader of the House of Commons.

It has been necessary to dwell at somewhat disproportionate length on the history of Peel's short administration in 1835—his "hundred days," as the period has been not inaptly termed—because it throws a flood of light on the political and personal character of the man, and the condition of parties at the time. Peel was unexpectedly summoned to fight a losing battle

on ground not chosen by himself. Victory was impossible in the circumstances, but Peel's statesmanship was never more conspicuously manifested than in his conduct of the struggle, and in his behaviour after his defeat. He emerged from the conflict, by common consent, the most capable statesman of his time, and the country now knew that if the Whigs failed it again, as was not altogether unlikely, it could turn with confidence to the Opposition and its leader, being well assured that the antiquated and obsolete Toryism of Peel's younger days was gradually but surely being transformed into a rational, moderate, and not unprogressive conservatism.

On a large survey the omens were not unfavourable for the defeated minister. The tide of reform was steadily ebbing. The support of the Radicals combined with that of O'Connell had enabled the Whigs to recover office, but it had not restored them to substantive power. The designs of the Radicals were as distasteful to them as they were to the Tories. The support of O'Connell was fatal to their hold on the Protestant middle-class of England. In the House of Lords they were in a permanent minority, and were confronted with the immense authority of Wellington, the astute and withal uncompromising hostility of Lyndhurst, and the restless, implacable, and unscrupulous animosity of Brougham, ever ready to make mischief by dwelling upon their blunders, and to add to their embarrassments with the malign ingenuity of a candid friend. They were not united among themselves. The Premier himself was at no pains to maintain his authority over his ill-assorted Cabinet, and the more capable of his colleagues were constantly chafing over blunders which,

in the abeyance of his authority, they had no power either to prevent or to correct. As regards England their measures were delayed, mutilated, and often destroyed in the House of Lords. As regards Ireland, though comparative tranquillity was ensured by the alliance with O'Connell, and they were still further fortunate in securing the invaluable services of Thomas Drummond as Under-Secretary, yet their legislative powers were equally restricted, and it was not until three years had been spent in fruitless efforts to fulfil their pledges that they were able to settle the tithe question by abandoning the principle of appropriation, and with it their political self-respect. In foreign and colonial affairs their difficulties were almost unexampled, and many of them could easily be represented even by a patriotic leader of Opposition as mainly of their own creation. Between 1835 and 1841 Canada was in open revolt, and Jamaica in veiled rebellion. Canada was pacified, but the measures adopted were due rather to Lord Durham than to the Ministry who recalled Lord Durham for exceeding his instructions; while the Jamaica question brought about the crisis of 1839, which will shortly engage our attention. Before he quitted office in 1841 Lord Palmerston had alienated France by his high-handed and audacious but not unsuccessful policy in Syria, and had involved the country in successive wars with Persia and with China, while the Government of India had been committed to the disastrous invasion of Afghanistan. The financial policy of the Whigs was marked by recurring deficits, and a lamentable failure of capacity in that important department of public administration. The country was

distressed and discontented; the new Poor Law, one of the most notable and beneficent of the Whigs' achievements in legislation, was intensely and universally unpopular, the reform of the municipal corporations irritated the classes without attracting the masses. Radicalism, discredited and outvoted in Parliament, was taking the form of chartism among the populace, trade was languishing and hampered by fiscal restrictions, and above all, the anti-Corn-Law League was fast becoming a power in the State; a power which was destined in the end to triumph through the splendid apostasy of Peel himself, although its triumph was so little anticipated by the country's rulers that Melbourne once publicly declared that the repeal of the corn laws was "one of the wildest and maddest schemes that ever entered into the imagination of man," and Peel was recalled to power in 1841 with a direct mandate from the constituencies, and especially from the agricultural interest, to resist it to the uttermost.

It is not necessary for the purposes of this biography to dwell in any detail on the history of the Melbourne Administration. There is rarely much to invite the attention of history in the parliamentary life of a leader of Opposition, though Peel's task was certainly one of no ordinary difficulty. Both parties were undergoing a transformation; the Tories gradually adapting themselves to the spirit of the new constitution established in 1832, and becoming Conservatives in the process, and the Whigs emancipating themselves from the Radical impulse in accordance with the feeling of the country, which desired tranquillity rather than reform. The situation required that, while educating

his own followers to a more liberal view of public measures and public affairs, Peel should keep up their spirit and discipline by frequent attacks on the Government, and yet should not alienate the more moderate and conservative of the Whigs by pushing his opposition to the verge of faction. This was the more difficult because Lyndhurst was a man of far less politic and far more combative temper, and Lyndhurst's influence in the House of Lords was scarcely second to that of Wellington himself. Nevertheless, Peel succeeded in an undertaking which often tries the capacity of public men even more than that of conducting the affairs of a great empire. He held his party together, enlarging its basis and consolidating its ranks, and kept his opponents in office until the time was ripe for his own return to real power. That might have happened in 1839, but for an untoward misunderstanding with the queen. So completely had Peel by this time established his ascendency, that early in 1839, Leader, the Radical member for Westminster, declared in a debate on the Irish policy of the Government, amid applause from both sides of the House, that "the right honourable member for Tamworth governs England. The honourable and learned member for Dublin governs Ireland. The Whigs govern nothing but Downing Street."

For a time after Peel's overthrow the restored Whigs managed to present an appearance of capacity, strength, and public confidence. Much of the legislation which men are apt to think of as due to the energy of the first reformed Parliament was really the work of the Melbourne Government, and of Lord John Russell's ardour and capacity for legislation. But in spite of its

early achievements, the second administration of Melbourne was never popular; the alliance with O'Connell was fatal to it. Its credit gradually waned until 1837, when the death of William IV, and the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne, brought about an unexpected dissolution of Parliament. In the general election which followed the Tories gained and the Radicals lost, but the Whigs still retained a narrow majority. No change of Government ensued, but a very material change was effected in the organic constitution of parties. Its nature may not inaptly be indicated by two personal illustrations. Grote, the Radical member for the City of London, the parliamentary champion of the ballot, and better known in subsequent years as the historian of Greece, was returned at the bottom of the poll, only defeating his Conservative opponent by six votes; and Stanley appeared at the hustings as the cordial supporter of Peel. The Radicals in fact had become *une quantité négligeable* in the calculations of the party in power, while the party in Opposition was in process of being reinforced by those nominal Whigs, who either were really Conservative in temperament or were alienated from their natural allies by what they denounced as unworthy concessions to the Radicals or to O'Connell.

The result of this latter process was officially acknowledged and publicly displayed in 1838 at a banquet given to Peel and his principal associates and followers at Merchant Taylors' Hall. This banquet had been preceded by rumours and suggestions of a coalition. The issues which had divided the Ministry from the Opposition, mainly in connection with Ireland, were slowly being settled, partly by compromise and partly by surrender; and

O'Connell, who was beginning to see that he had nothing more to expect from the Whigs, had already founded the curiously-named "Precursor Society" in Ireland—a society intended to provide for a renewal of the agitation for repeal as soon as the Whigs should be overthrown. But coalitions are alien to the spirit of party government in this country. They do not commend themselves to the average voter. A Peel or a Russell both intent on the welfare of the State and the efficient conduct of public affairs may often fancy that their common ends may be better attained by concert than by antagonism. But to the average voter blue remains blue, and yellow remains yellow, and political power is the result of a preponderance at the polls of one colour over the other. That a public man should openly change sides, especially if he can appeal to some show of conviction and public spirit, is no shock to public opinion, and involves no disturbance of party relations. But it is quite another thing for the two sides to combine, and to claim the common support of followers who have spent their public lives in more or less personal antagonism. That is a proceeding which, however rational in itself, the average voter can neither understand nor tolerate. In point of fact it is easier, as our political history has repeatedly shown, for a Conservative leader to persuade his whole party to carry out the policy of his opponents than to induce his followers to believe that their opponents are not to be opposed. Party government is no ideal method of conducting public affairs. In reason it is absurd that, as a brilliant writer has put it, "half the cleverest men in the country should take the utmost pains to prevent the other half

from governing." But for practical purposes a better system is hard to find, as the wisest political reasoners from Burke onwards have acknowledged. If this be so, we must take the system with its defects as well as its merits, and not expect from it that which, from its very nature, it cannot give.

However this may be, there was no coalition in 1838, although then and later its possibility and expediency were much canvassed in many quarters. But the Merchant Taylors' banquet showed that the Tory party under Peel's guidance had accomplished its transformation. Three hundred and thirteen members of the House of Commons had concurred in the invitation, and no less than three hundred were present, including Stanley and Graham, who were now formally enrolled in the ranks of Peel's supporters. The Parliamentary following of these seceders from the Whigs was slender, and Graham had even lost his seat for Cumberland in the general election of 1837. But their inclusion in the party of Peel was significant of a change in political feeling throughout the country, which, aided by the weakness and the administrative blunders of the Whigs, was certain sooner or later to transfer the semblance as well as the substance of power to the one statesman whom the country recognised as capable of extricating it from its difficulties. Peel's speech at Merchant Taylors' Hall was almost as important a political manifesto as his memorable address to the electors of Tamworth in 1835. He showed how his party had recovered from its overthrow in 1832, had more than doubled its strength in 1835, and in spite of the electioneering arts of the Whigs, who did not, as he alleged, scruple to use the

popularity of the young queen for political purposes, had again increased its numbers in 1837; how, in consequence of the weakness of the Whigs and their inability to resist the demands of the Radicals, the Conservative party had been compelled to assume many of the functions and some of the responsibilities of government; how, for instance, a motion for the exclusion of the bishops from the House of Lords had been rejected at the instance of the Government by a majority of 197, though the supporters of the Government contributed only 50 votes to the total; how in similar circumstances only 74 Whigs voted in a majority of 300 against the repeal of the Corn Laws, and only 61 Whigs in a majority of 315 against the Ballot. From these and similar premisses he drew the conclusion that the duty of the Conservative party was to continue in the same course of prudent and patriotic opposition. "I ask those friends who are impatient of more decisive action to remember the steps by which our power has been daily advancing. I call upon them to remember that it has been by moderation, by prudence, by an undeviating adherence to our principles that we have attained our present position. This I advise, that on every occasion, be the consequence what it may, we should resist the acts of the Government when we believe them to be injurious, and avoid no fitting opportunity of enforcing the principles we maintain; that, for the purpose of averting any change in the Government, we should on no account abate in the slightest degree one of those principles which we consider essential to the security of our institutions in Church and State; but I do hope we shall never be betrayed, for the sake of any temporary

advantage, into a union with those from whose principles we wholly disagree."

The whole tone of the speech was that of a statesman who feels that the flowing tide is with him. The Whig party was disintegrated; the force of political attraction carried over its more timid elements to the Conservatives, while the force of political repulsion severed its centre from its left. Content to rule the country through the dissensions of his opponents, the Conservative leader was little minded to hasten his return to Downing Street. But the summons came almost unexpectedly in the following year. In 1838 the Whigs, at the price of abandoning the principle of appropriation, were at last allowed to settle the question of the Irish tithe. In 1839 a fresh humiliation was inflicted on them by the formal censure in the House of Lords of the principles on which Normanby and Morpeth, admirably aided by Drummond, had maintained tranquillity in Ireland without the aid of exceptional repressive legislation. Lord John Russell insisted that the credit of the Government should be restored by a vote of confidence in the House of Commons, having especial reference to the Irish policy of the Government. Projects of coalition again filled the air of Downing Street and Whitehall. Lord John Russell was weary of the strife, shattered in health by his political labours, and broken in spirit by the recent loss of his wife. He was not unwilling to accept defeat, and, avoiding an immediate dissolution, to offer Peel his independent support. Peel was apprised of his views and urged to moderate his tone in the impending debate on the vote of confidence, in order to secure the ulterior co-operation of the Whigs. He consented reluctantly

going down to the House, as he told Stanley, with two speeches, and ultimately delivering the less aggressive one, in response to the reserved and moderate tone adopted by the minister. But nothing really came of all this finesse. Ministers secured a majority of 22, the question being one on which they could count on the undiminished support of O'Connell and the Radicals, and soon afterwards Peel resolved to attack them directly on the Jamaica question. The Assembly of Jamaica, composed chiefly of planters incensed at the abolition of slavery, declined to adopt a Prisons Act passed by the Imperial Parliament. Some members of the Government desired in consequence to convert Jamaica into a Crown Colony. But dissensions in the Cabinet resulted in a compromise, and a Bill was introduced to suspend the Assembly for five years. Peel strenuously opposed this Bill, and the second reading was only carried by a majority of five. The ministers, judging that this majority was not sufficient to carry their measure, at once tendered their resignations to the queen. On Melbourne's advice Wellington was sent for in the first instance, and he lost no time in recommending the queen to invite Peel to undertake the government. Peel consented, and his Cabinet was speedily formed, the co-operation of Stanley and Graham being no longer withheld.

Then followed the memorable episode which was known in contemporary annals as the "Bedchamber Plot." In truth there was nothing of a plot in it, though there was a great deal of misunderstanding and not a little mismanagement. The royal household had been formed at the beginning of the reign with the advice of

the ministers in office at the time. It contained, among others, Lady Normanby, wife of the Irish Viceroy, and a sister of Lord Morpeth, Chief Secretary for Ireland, both of whom were ladies of the bedchamber; and the appointments in general were held not unnaturally to show that the ministers possessed the entire confidence of the Crown. Not less naturally, when Peel was summoned to undertake the government he desired to be able to exhibit to the country an equally public mark of the royal confidence. He felt, as he subsequently explained in his place in Parliament, that being in a minority in the House of Commons, his legitimate authority in the country would be impaired if the queen were to remain surrounded with the friends and relatives of the late ministers, whose influence over her had, on account of her youth and inexperience, become personal rather than political. Accordingly, when he went to the palace with a list of his Cabinet, and had obtained the royal assent to the nominations he proposed to make, he intimated to the queen that it would also be necessary that he should be permitted to recommend certain changes among the ladies of the household. The queen replied at once that she must reserve the whole of these appointments, and that it was her pleasure that the whole should continue without any change. Peel thereupon stated frankly that he must consult his colleagues, and left the palace for the purpose. The queen, on her part, forthwith appealed to her late ministers for advice and support. A Cabinet Council was held, and a memorandum was drawn up, in which the queen was advised to inform Peel that, having considered the proposal to remove the ladies of her

bedchamber, she could not consent to adopt a course which she conceived to be contrary to usage, and which was repugnant to her feelings. It appears that some of Melbourne's colleagues were of opinion that Lady Normanby at least, if not others, should be recommended to resign, while Lord John Russell proposed that the queen should be advised to require from Peel a precise statement of his demands. Had either of these courses been adopted the difficulty might have been overcome.

But the personal circumstances of the case were all unfavourable to a compromise. Peel was little schooled in the ways of courts, and not particularly adroit in accommodating what he regarded as principle to their exigencies. The queen was inexperienced, personally attached to the ministers who had surrounded her youthful throne, and deeply mortified by the proposal to dismiss the ladies of her household. On all subsequent occasions, however, the principle for which Peel contended has been cheerfully conceded, and it has now been constitutionally established. The judgment of Melbourne was probably warped by his paternal regard for the sovereign over whose political education he had presided with rare devotion and discretion, while some of his colleagues might not be proof against the temptation of giving such advice to the Crown as would enable them to pose before the country as defending a royal lady against an insult alike unmanly and unconstitutional. However this may be. Peel, on receipt of the queen's memorandum, resigned his commission to form a Government, and the Whigs resumed their offices. The crisis was at an end, but the Whigs were weaker than ever, though the

Tories incurred the discredit of having insulted the Crown.

Peel had now to wait for two years longer before the opportunity of power returned to him. When power came at last to him in 1841 it came in abundant measure, and the transformed Conservative party secured a decisive majority in a Parliament elected under Whig auspices. The truth is that the Whigs were being ground to powder between the upper mill-stone of a conservatism adapted by the genius of Peel to the political conditions of a reformed Parliament, and the nether mill-stone of an aggressive and too eager radicalism. They could not comprehend or control the political forces which reform had evoked. Lord John Russell had incurred the odium of his followers in 1837 by a declaration interpreted to signify the "finality" of the Reform Act. He even fancied that the "movement," as radicalism was called in the political slang of the time, could be stopped by a sort of informal coalition between his own immediate followers and Peel. He was slow to perceive that the radicalism of those days was merely the liberalism of the future, the parliamentary expression of popular discontents, that the Whigs must reckon with it as the Tories had reckoned with the spirit of reform, and that men like Grote and Cobden were not to be disposed of as mere firebrands and demagogues. In Opposition his eyes and those of his colleagues were gradually opened, but the widening schism between Whigs and Radicals clearly indicated that a reaction had set in, and that the time was fast ripening for a powerful Conservative Government to undertake the conduct of public affairs.

Nevertheless, weaker and weaker as the Whigs steadily grew before their final overthrow, torn as they were by internal dissensions, and deserted by many of the more capable and progressive of their supporters, it must be recorded to their credit that the nine years which followed the reform of Parliament in 1832 laid the legislative foundation of the polity which modern England enjoys. The Melbourne Government bears no very exalted reputation in our history. But it governed Ireland successfully; it settled the tithe question in England and Ireland, and reformed the municipal corporations in both countries; it established the penny post, and laid the foundations of a system of national education; it witnessed a demise of the Crown, and through its chief it gave instruction to the youthful queen "in the great constitutional lessons, to which for half a century her majesty has been the first of our sovereigns to give an effect at once conspicuous and complete." But its finance down to 1839 was, according to the authority just quoted, namely, Mr. Gladstone, "intolerably bad." In 1840 some attempt was made to stem the tide of deficit by an increase of taxation, and in 1841 the Whigs at last began to see that free trade must be reckoned with. They proposed certain readjustments of taxation, which involved in principle a revolution in financial policy. But their power was spent and their budget was defeated. They accepted defeat and abandoned their proposals. But Peel by this time was ready to take their place. He brought forward a direct vote of want of confidence, and carried it by a majority of one. A dissolution ensued, and in the elections which followed

Peel obtained a decisive majority. His triumph was legitimate, and achieved by statesmanship of a high order. But the financial flounderings of the Whigs had compelled him to return to power as the champion and representative of protection.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADMINISTRATION OF 1841

1841–1846

THE political emancipation of the English middle class was accomplished by the Whig party and its leaders; its economical emancipation was accomplished by the Tory leader in spite of his party. In the Parliament elected in 1841 Peel could reckon on a majority of 90, but only 112 of his followers voted in favour of the repeal of the corn laws in 1846, the rest of the majority being supplied from the Opposition. The explanation is not far to seek. The Tory party, though now called Conservative, and partially permeated with the more liberal ideas of Peel, was still the party of the aristocracy. The Reform Bill had deprived the aristocracy of its predominance in the State. But it had not changed its nature, nor purged it of its characteristic ideas, sentiments, interests, prejudices, and predilections. Peel, on the other hand, was no aristocrat. It was his pride, as he once boasted in the House of Commons, to lead and represent the "gentlemen of England." But he belonged himself by birth and temperament to the new social order which the economical expansion of the last century

had created. The surface of his mind was eminently conservative, adamantine in texture, impenetrable, invulnerable; but its depths were stirred by the volcanic forces of a masculine and unbiassed reason, combined with an unswerving and even passionate regard for the public welfare. Hence he was little qualified by nature to be the leader of the party of resistance. No man could resist up to a certain point more stoutly than he; no politician was ever more ingenious, plausible, and fertile in upholding the accomplished fact. But with Peel resistance always began to end at the point where his mind had ceased to be convinced. He might still fight on for a time on grounds of expediency and opportunism, but it was certain that sooner or later his action would follow his conviction. Intellectual conviction was "the immediate jewel of his soul." He would not barter it for the plaudits of a party, or for the blandishments of power. He would be minister of England, as he scornfully said on the eve of defeat, "on no servile tenure"; he would only hold that office "on the condition of being unshackled by any other obligations than those of consulting the public interests and of providing for the public safety."

The historian cannot hesitate to say that, judged by the high standard of public welfare and enlightened policy, Peel was right in this controversy, and his party wrong. It is quite a different question, and one more difficult to resolve, whether the party system of government is consistent with the unshackled right claimed by the minister to give advice irrespective of party pledges and party obligations. That, however, is a question which can more easily be decided when the circumstances

which produced the rupture between Peel and his party have been more fully examined. For the present it is sufficient to say that there was no department of statesmanship in which a breach was so likely to occur as that of finance—a department which the circumstances of the time required the minister to handle boldly, while his own genius specially fitted him to handle it brilliantly. The finance of the Whigs had been a lamentable failure. Their foreign policy had increased expenditure, while their attempts to increase the revenue were alike clumsy and inadequate. They had established the penny post without providing for the immediate loss of revenue which it was certain to entail. In 1840 Baring, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had attempted to restore the equilibrium by a general increase of taxation without readjustment of its incidence, and the attempt had proved a failure. In the same year the celebrated Committee on Imports had sat and reported, and the effects of its report were seen in the abortive budget of 1841. The Whigs at last began to see that the protective system under which the commerce and industry of the country groaned could no longer be maintained. A fresh turn of the screw had been their only expedient for raising revenue in 1840. In 1841 they determined to try an experiment in relaxation. To the growing agitation for the repeal of the corn laws they so far yielded as to propose a moderate and fixed duty in lieu of the sliding scale established in 1828, and they so far profited by the teaching of the Imports Committee as to recommend a large reduction in the protective and differential duties on timber and sugar. But by this time their course was run, and they were not even

allowed to save themselves by a death-bed repentance. Defeated on a vote of confidence, they appealed to the country, and were decisively condemned.

The department of finance and of fiscal policy in general was thus marked out for Peel as his appointed field of activity. The country was weary of organic legislation. In that sense it was conservative in temper. But it demanded relief from its anxiety and distress. "Never before had British minister a more serious task before him. Abroad, the heavens were black with clouds. The East, notwithstanding Palmerston and Napier, was still ruffled by action; France had neither forgotten nor forgiven the policy of 1840; Canada was still brooding over her wrongs; the United States were preparing for war; China was actually struggling with the British Empire, and disaster was already prepared for British arms in Afghanistan. At home the prolonged depression of trade had produced severe distress; distress, in its turn, had led to riot, and the Ministry had to deal with two formidable organisations—one prepared by the working classes to secure their own political supremacy, the other inspired by the manufacturing classes to promote free trade in corn. The people, moreover, were demanding the immediate repeal of the new Poor Law. An increasing expenditure and a contracted revenue were perplexing statesmen. The haste with which the preceding Parliament had been dissolved had even interfered with the necessary financial arrangements for the year. Every difficulty which could embarrass a statesman stood in the way of Peel and his new colleagues."[1]

[1] Walpole, *History of England*, vol. iv. p. 116.

Peel confronted these difficulties with undaunted courage and a profound confidence in his capacity to surmount them. He was supported by a powerful party, flushed with victory and, for a time, unswerving in its allegiance. His colleagues were men of high repute, approved capacity, and large public experience. Wellington, who sat in the Cabinet without holding any office, undertook the lead of the House of Lords. Lyndhurst resumed the Chancellorship, and Lord Aberdeen accepted the seals of the Foreign Office. In the House of Commons the Prime Minister's principal lieutenants were Sir James Graham, who became Home Secretary; Goulburn, who became Chancellor of the Exchequer, but was completely eclipsed by the financial genius of his chief; Stanley, who became Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Sir Henry Hardinge, who, until he became Governor-General of India on the recall of Lord Ellenborough, held the office of Secretary at War. Among the younger men who owed their promotion to Peel's discernment and afterwards rose to high power and influence in the State were Lord Canning, whom he had unsuccessfully invited to join him in 1834, Lord Dalhousie, Lord Lincoln, afterwards Duke of Newcastle, Mr. Sidney Herbert, Mr. Cardwell, and, not least, Mr. Gladstone, who, as Vice-President of the Board of Trade, became one of his chief assistants in the preparation of his financial measures, and, next to himself, their most powerful advocate in the House of Commons. There was one young man of rare, but as yet unrecognised, capacity and unbounded ambition whom Peel passed over, though whether deliberately or through inadvertence it is not easy to determine.

Benjamin Disraeli had already told Lord Melbourne that he intended to be Prime Minister, and the House of Commons that the time would come when he would make it hear him. But his erratic courses and strange antics had blinded many to his rare political powers, and were little likely to recommend him to a man of Peel's exalted and almost pedantic sense of the proprieties of public life. He obtained no place in the new Government, and though for a time he flattered the minister, it was not long before he turned against him and began to assail him with a vigour and a virulence of invective which are almost without a parallel in the annals of Parliamentary warfare.

Eminent in character, capacity, and public repute as were Peel's principal colleagues, the Prime Minister overtopped them all. No administration in modern times has been so completely identified with and absorbed in its chief as the second Government of Sir Robert Peel. Mr. Gladstone, from whose authority on such a point there is no appeal, has spoken of it as "a perfectly organised administration," as one in which nothing of great importance was matured, or would even be projected, in any department without the personal cognisance of the Prime Minister. No greater contrast in this respect could well be conceived than that between Peel's Cabinet and the Cabinet of Lord Melbourne. Even in the department of Foreign Affairs—a department in which, according to the practice now established, the responsibility and control of the Prime Minister are, or ought to be, more direct and more continuous than in any other—Palmerston went his own way without hindrance or control. Peel

would never have tolerated this unconstitutional relaxation of the solidarity of the Cabinet, this mischievous abdication of the authority of the Prime Minister. His own authority was paramount, and no minister ever more completely identified himself in thought and speech with the policy and measures for which his Government was responsible. A student of his speeches, unfamiliar with the forms and methods of the constitution, might easily draw the inference from the language habitually used by Peel in the House of Commons, that he alone was minister, and that his colleagues were merely his subordinates. Other ministers have commonly used the first person plural in speaking of the acts and proposals of the Government they represent; Peel constantly used the first person singular. This significant habit is not to be ascribed to mere vulgar egotism. Peel, it is true, was by no means deficient in the valuable parliamentary qualities of self-esteem and self-assertion. But the politic and probably unconscious egotism of his oratory was due to no personal vanity. It was his way of saying what Chatham finely said to the Duke of Devonshire: "My lord, I am sure that I can save this country, and that no one else can." Peel was reserved, unexpansive, awkward in manner, little disposed to open his mind freely even in intimate council. Probably his Cabinet rarely knew the full breadth and measure of the designs he entertained; often he strove to conceal them even from himself. He was a consummate opportunist, cautious and circumspect until action became necessary, but intrepid and irresistible when once he had resolved to act, an acute and diligent observer of the movement

of public opinion, in a word, an unrivalled "parliamentary hand." No man is a statesman who lacks these qualities and endowments, but often enough they are only the martyr's crown of a statesmanship which is worthier than themselves. To the moralist they are a stumbling-block, to the philosopher they are foolishness, to the partisan they afford inexhaustible material for suspicion, imputation, and invective. Nevertheless to the statesman they are indispensable. Peel possessed them in a measure which combined with his public pre-eminence and the personal deficiencies of his manner and address to give to his parliamentary oratory an appearance of isolation and egotism far in excess of the real facts of the case.

The summer was well advanced before the new Ministry was fully constituted. There was no time to do more than to make the necessary provision, financial, administrative, and legislative, for carrying on the public service. The new Poor Law, which was about to expire, was re-enacted for twelve months, and financial equilibrium was maintained by means of a temporary loan. The Opposition pressed the new minister for an immediate declaration of policy on the questions which were agitating the public mind, but he replied with effect that the Whigs had been in office for ten years without being able to allay the prevailing discontents, and with reason, that time was needed to enable the new Government to mature its measures. The argument was unanswerable, and the time was admirably employed. When Parliament met early in 1842 the Queen's Speech recommended to its immediate attention "the state of the finances and of the expenditure of the

country." "You will have seen with regret," it continued, "that for several years past the annual income has been inadequate to bear the public charges, and I feel confident, that fully sensible of the evil which must result from a continued deficiency of this nature during peace, you will carefully consider the best means of averting it. I recommend to your consideration the state of the laws which affect the import of corn and of other articles, the produce of foreign countries." In these words the note of the succeeding session was struck. Peel lost no time in introducing his measure for the modification of the existing corn law. The import duty on corn, imposed in 1815 for the purpose of prohibiting the introduction of foreign corn whenever the price of British corn was below 80s. a quarter, had been modified in 1828 in grudging accordance with the more liberal policy of Canning and Huskisson by the introduction of what was known as "the sliding scale." This was an expedient whereby the duty was made to vary inversely with the price, and to fall to a nominal rate when the price reached a certain point. The object of both measures was the protection of the landed interest and the maintenance of the farmers' profits, while their more plausible defence was found in the alleged necessity of enabling the country to feed its population out of its own resources. It may be assumed here, for reasons which need not be specified in detail, that the sliding scale of 1828 had become indefensible in 1841. But neither party was yet prepared to sweep away the whole clumsy and baneful machinery of a tax on the nation's food. The Whigs had declared in 1841 for a fixed duty of 8s. a quarter.

This compelled their opponents by an irresistible law of party warfare to adopt the only practicable alternative of a modified sliding scale. Of two equally mischievous alternatives they probably chose the more easily defensible, since, as Peel showed with the facile polemic of a party politician, no minister would dare to maintain a fixed duty in face of impending scarcity. It is true that the representatives of the landed interest, "men of metal and large acred squires," who still formed the flower of the Tory party, desired no change in the existing law. It kept up their rents if it did not protect their tenants against ruinous fluctuations in price; and though it would be unjust to say that this was all they cared about, yet this circumstance and their profound indifference to the larger economical aspects of the question undoubtedly biassed their judgment and determined their vote. With the unerring instinct of a threatened monopoly they felt that to touch the corn law was to weaken it. The Whigs had touched the ark of protection and had perished; the sacred emblem was now placed in the custody of Peel, and it was impossible that he could betray them. In ordinary circumstances, and with leaders of common fibre, their calculation would have been sound, and their confidence justly placed.

But the circumstances were not ordinary, and neither Peel nor Wellington was a statesman who placed party above the State. There cannot be a shadow of doubt that Peel took office in 1841 with a full determination to maintain the corn laws, to modify them, it may be, but still to maintain them in principle, on grounds of public welfare and expediency. Though a

consummate financier, he was not a trained economist. Political economy was not in those days a parliamentary subject. It was left to the philosophers and to those rare disciples of the new learning, of whom Mr. Charles Villiers was the sole prominent representative in the House of Commons before Cobden reluctantly consented to stand for Stockport in 1841. To Peel and most of his colleagues it was a closed book; but they were educated in its doctrines, and urged to its conclusions by the stern discipline of public affairs. In the case of the corn laws they were slow to learn the lesson. Monopolies die hard. The tax on corn was defended by the aristocratic order, by the landed interest, by the party of resistance, by the ablest statesman of his time. Its enemies were time, reason, and the commercial interests of the country. The wonder is, perhaps, not that the battle lasted so long, but that it ended as it did. Peel was content at the outset to tinker with the sliding scale. The burden must remain, for so the country had resolved, and he was still convinced himself of the justice and necessity of the tax, but he would make it easier to bear. Even this change, however, sufficed to alarm the more thorough-going Protectionists. The Duke of Buckingham had joined the Cabinet on its formation as the champion and representative of protection. He quitted it when Peel's plans for the modification of the sliding scale were matured by the minister and adopted by his colleagues. The sequel showed that he was right; but no principle adverse to protection was involved in a revision of the sliding scale, the sole effect of which was to give a more plausible colour of equity and expediency to a system devised and upheld

for the purpose of maintaining the farmers' profits and their landlords' rents by the exclusion of foreign competition.

It was far otherwise with the great budget which the Prime Minister himself expounded to the House of Commons early in the session of 1842. If the protectionists had been economists, they might have perceived that as Peel propounded his masterly plans for the reconstruction of the national finance, he was sounding the death-knell of the corn laws. He had not allowed the Whigs in 1841 to lower the differential duties on timber and sugar. But though timber and sugar were still treated as sacred, so far as differential taxation was concerned, the old protective tariff was riddled through and through by the memorable budget of 1842. Peel had been irresistibly compelled to take a comprehensive survey of the whole financial situation. He had studied the Report of the Imports Committee of 1840, and meditated on the sources and conditions of commercial prosperity with that rare insight into affairs, and that extraordinary readiness to follow the conclusions of sound reason which made him so great a statesman and so disappointing a party leader. The result was that he became at once a free trader in principle, though for some time longer he remained a protectionist in the matter of corn. The budget of 1842 was essentially a free trader's budget.

The situation was indeed almost desperate. War expenditure and financial incapacity had accumulated deficit upon deficit amounting in all to over five millions in the financial year ending in 1841. The following year showed a further deficit of some two and a quarter

millions, while the coming year, with which the minister had to deal, would, on the basis of the revenue of the preceding year, add two and a half millions more to the existing deficiency; and taking other adverse circumstances into account, the whole deficiency to be met in 1843 was estimated to amount to £10,072,000. No relief was to be obtained from a fresh increase of existing taxation. The failure of the Whigs' experiment in 1840, when an addition of 5 per cent to the customs and excise duties had been estimated to produce £1,895,000 and had actually produced only £206,000, showed conclusively, as Peel argued, though the Whigs contested the point, that the country had "arrived at the limits of taxation on articles of consumption." Peel, moreover, was deeply moved at the prevailing distress of the industrial classes. He was too much a man of the people himself, and also too much of a statesman to taunt them with "ignorant impatience of taxation." "Ce qui me frappa surtout dans la conversation de Sir Robert Peel," writes Guizot, "ce fut sa constante et passionnée préoccupation de l'état des classes ouvrières en Angleterre, préoccupation morale autant que politique, et dans laquelle, sous un langage froid et un peu compassé, perçait l'émotion de l'homme aussi bien que la prévoyance de l'homme d'État." Accordingly he resolved to embark on the course of which Huskisson many years ago had taught him the expediency, and his own financial genius had revealed to him the potency, while the circumstances of the time had convinced him of its necessity; the course, that is, of seeking the restoration of the revenue through the relief of taxation. He was, however, too cautious a financier to rely on mere remission of taxation

to cover the existing deficit and restore the financial equilibrium. For this purpose it was necessary to devise a more powerful and immediately productive engine of finance. Making "an earnest appeal to the possessors of property, for the purpose of repairing this mighty evil" of recurring deficits, he boldly proposed an income-tax, to be imposed for three years, of 7d. in the pound, or approximately 3 per cent. A mere financial purist, without genius and without a statesmanlike perception of the conditions of national welfare, might have been content with this expedient. But Peel was a statesman as well as a financier. He looked to the future as well as to the passing moment, and he was not without a keen perception of the parliamentary advantage of remitting taxes with one hand while imposing them with the other. But his remissions were founded on a principle, and that principle logically involved free trade. "We have proceeded," he said, "on these principles. First we desire to remove all prohibition, and the relaxation of duties of a prohibitory character; next we wish to reduce the duties on raw materials for manufactures, to a considerable extent—in some cases the duty we propose being merely nominal, for the purpose more of statistical than revenue objects, in no case, or scarcely any, exceeding in the case of raw materials more than 5 per cent. Then we propose that the duties on articles partly manufactured shall be materially reduced, never exceeding 12 per cent; while as to duties on articles wholly manufactured we propose that they shall never exceed 20 per cent."

Such were the essential features of the famous and epoch-making budget of 1842. To examine it in any

detail, or to follow the interminable controversies to which it gave rise in Parliament—its discussion absorbed nearly the whole session—would far exceed the limits of this biography. That it was in essence a free trade budget —though it must be acknowledged that it sadly disappointed the free traders and representatives of the League—can be shown in a very few words. A protective tariff is a tariff imposed, not for the purpose of obtaining revenue, but for that of limiting or prohibiting foreign competition in respect of the commodities taxed. So far as it has this effect a tariff is protective; so far as this effect is abated by any alteration of tariff the change is in the direction of free trade. Peel's avowed object was to increase the importation of foreign commodities by reducing their price to the consumer; and the fact that the native producer of competing commodities was undersold in the process did not deter him from making the change. He saw and maintained that on the final balance even the individual was benefited by the substitution of low prices for high prices. "The difficulty will be," he wrote to Croker towards the close of the session of 1842, "to prove that we have gone far enough *in concession*—that is relaxation of prohibitions and protections — not that we have gone too far Something effectual must be done to revive, and revive permanently, the languishing commerce and languishing manufacturing industry of this country. . . . I repeat that the man who pays £2 : 18s. per cent on his income may make that saving on his expenditure in consequence of the tariff. . . . We must make this country a *cheap* country for living, and thus induce parties to remain and settle here. Enable them to consume more by having

more to spend." It is true that this reasoning leads directly to the total repeal of taxes on food, a conclusion which in 1842 Peel was not prepared to face. But he already admitted its logical validity, and only disputed its practical application. "We do not," he wrote to the same correspondent, "push this argument to its logical consequences, namely, that wheat should be at thirty-five shillings a quarter instead of fifty or fifty-four. We take into account vested interests, the importance of independent supply, the social benefits of flourishing agriculture, etc. We find that the general welfare will be best promoted by a fair adjustment—by allowing the legitimate logical deductions to be controlled by the thousand considerations which enter into moral and political questions, and which — as friction and the weight of the atmosphere disturb your mathematical conclusions—put a limit to the practical application of abstract reasoning." Croker appears at the time to have been satisfied with these assurances, and to have believed that Peel might still be trusted with the custody of the ark of protection; but had he possessed a deeper insight into the workings of Peel's intensely logical mind, and the intensely practical character of his genius, he might have divined that the end of the corn laws was not far distant.

It will be convenient at this point to neglect strict chronological order, and follow out in succession the principal branches of policy which illustrate the paramount influence of Peel's personal ascendency and independent initiative at this period of his career. The repeal of the corn laws and the events which led to it will be treated in a separate chapter; but.

so far as the general financial policy of Peel is independent of the corn laws, that topic may now be pursued without interruption. The budgets of 1843 and 1844 need not detain us long. They were not introduced by Peel himself, a sure sign that they were not considered by him, as were those of 1842 and 1845, to involve the broader issues of financial policy. In 1843 there was again a deficit, the only deficit in Peel's financial history for which he can be held responsible. But this deficit, though it disappointed the minister, did not shake the confidence of the country in the soundness of his financial measures. It was due to two causes: the first an oversight, remarkable enough in a man of Peel's vigilant accuracy, whereby credit had been taken for a whole year's income-tax although only half the payments due could be received at the exchequer in the course of the financial year; the second an oversanguine estimate of the rate at which the revenue would recover its elasticity in response to the large reductions of taxation made by the budget of 1842. The first error corrected itself to a considerable extent by the unexpected yield of the income-tax, which was largely in excess of Peel's cautious calculations. The second caused little anxiety, although it furnished abundant material for parliamentary criticism, because there were already signs that the measures of 1842 would bear fruit in the future, abundant in proportion to the time it had taken to ripen. This expectation was amply justified in 1844, when the finances of the country were found to be so flourishing that Goulburn was enabled to effect a large conversion of the debt, larger than any that had previously been attempted,

and since unequalled in extent until Mr. Goschen's memorable conversion of 1888; and Peel seized the opportunity afforded him by the renewal of the Bank Charter Act to complete the legislation so auspiciously begun by him in 1819, when the Act for the resumption of cash payments was, as we have seen, framed and passed.

Perhaps no legislation of modern times has been the occasion of a larger amount of idle controversy than the famous Bank Act of 1844. The whole subject of currency is one which requires extreme precision in thinking and the utmost caution in reasoning, and yet it is one which has always exercised a fatal fascination over minds to which these qualities have been denied. To do Parliament justice, it has rarely listened to the blandishments of currency-jugglers and believers in the possibility of substituting the printing-press for the mint as the source of the national currency. The Act of 1819 was passed almost by consent, though the celebrated Bullion Committee had reported to deaf ears only a few years before; and the Act of 1844 encountered no serious opposition in Parliament. But the literature of the subject is almost as voluminous as the paper issues of the Bank of England, and, with a few memorable exceptions, its value is about the same as those issues would have had by this time if the currency-jugglers had prevailed. Nevertheless, the whole matter can be very simply explained. The primary object of the Act of 1844 was to regulate the paper issues of the Bank of England, and to restrict those of other banks which at that time enjoyed the right of issue. A sound paper currency is one of

which the holder can at all times obtain the exact value in coin or bullion from the issuer. The Act of 1819 aimed at securing a paper currency of this kind. The Bank of England, together with other banks throughout the country, enjoyed the right of issue. In the abstract it would probably have been best for the legislature to withdraw this right altogether, and transfer it to a department of the executive Government, making it, for example, the duty of the mint to issue notes against gold delivered to it at the mint price,[1] and to return gold for the notes on demand. This, however, was not done in 1819, and though it was done in effect in 1844, that effect was masked by provisions designed to avoid too violent a breach in the historical continuity of the banking system of the country. It was thought in 1819 that the obligation imposed on the bank to give gold in exchange for notes to all who presented the latter and demanded the former would compel it to keep at all times a reserve of gold sufficient to meet all emergencies. But in times of pressure it was found that the temptation to apply the gold required to sustain and liquidate their issues to the support and relief of their ordinary banking business was too strong for the directors of the bank to resist. This, indeed, is almost inevitable when a paper currency, controlled and regulated by the legislature, and thereby invested in some measure with the credit and authority of the State, is placed at the disposal of a private banking corporation, such as the Bank of England essentially is, in its banking capacity. A severe crisis occurred in 1826, and some restrictions were in consequence imposed

[1] For an explanation of this term see note at p. 48.

on the powers of the bank—notably the abolition of one-pound notes—and although the Bank Charter Act was again renewed in 1836, when fresh modifications and restrictions were imposed which need not here be described in detail, a crisis occurred in 1839 of such severity that the bank itself was only preserved from temporary insolvency through a timely advance of gold by the Bank of France.

In 1840 the House of Commons, alarmed by the severe and disastrous crisis of 1839, appointed a powerful committee, of which Peel was a member, to investigate and report upon the whole question of the relations of the Bank of England to the State. The currency-jugglers of the time were not unrepresented on this committee, and they occupied a good deal of its attention; but among the witnesses examined was Mr. Jones Loyd, afterwards Lord Overstone, a London banker of rare sagacity, who propounded the true principles of currency with a tenacity which confounded his adversaries and a lucidity which ought to have convinced them. Peel, whose mind when undisturbed by political prejudice or party prepossession turned instinctively to the pole of right reason, was profoundly impressed with the arguments of Jones Loyd and his associates, and in 1844, when a provision of the Bank Charter Act of 1836 enabled him to take up the subject, he resolved to complete the work of 1819, and to place the national currency on a basis as firm as was compatible with a due regard for the historical evolution of the national system of banking. The great speech in which he introduced his measure is the Parliamentary foundation of all sound thinking on the subject, and remains to this

day the most authoritative exposition of the true principles of the national currency. The true basis of currency in this country is and has always been—with the exception of the years from 1797 to 1819 when the Bank Restriction Act was in operation—"a certain definite quantity of gold with a mark upon it to determine its weight and fineness," the pound, that is, according to the celebrated definition given by Peel in the speech already mentioned. The paper currency founded on this basis consists of promissory notes, that is, obligations undertaken by the issuer to pay on demand the exact number of pounds, as defined above, which corresponds to the respective denominations of the notes. There is no reason why the State should not undertake the issue of all such promissory notes, as it has long ago undertaken the issue of all coined money, and decline to issue the notes except in exchange for gold of a corresponding amount as measured by the mint price; and there are many reasons of convenience and public expediency why it should. In that case a public department would be established as a deposit office for gold and bullion, the notes in circulation being merely warrants exchangeable on demand for gold or bullion and exactly corresponding in amount to the gold and bullion previously deposited.

Had Peel been required to create a convertible paper currency *de novo*, this is, perhaps, the plan which he might have been expected to adopt. But he found a paper currency in existence, connected with an institution of great financial and even political prestige, and in spite of certain inherent defects this paper was practi-

cally convertible at all times except at rare moments of great anxiety and disturbance. The real cause of its momentary inconvertibility at such times of crisis was the imperfect separation of the issue and banking departments of the Bank of England. At one stroke Peel cut the two asunder. The banking or deposit department became thenceforth merely the most important and powerful banking institution in the country, but entitled to no greater privileges and subject to no other restrictions than the law conferred or imposed on all other banks in the country.[1] The bank was left to deal with its customers exactly as any other bank deals with its customers, that is, according to its own discretion, subject only to the general laws affecting banking. The issue department, on the other hand, was reconstituted altogether, practically as a statutory department of the State, its issues being automatically or *quasi*-automatically regulated, but nominally under the management of the directors of the Bank of England. It held the securities for an immemorial loan of between £11,000,000 and £12,000,000 advanced at different times to the Government, and besides this it generally held Government securities to the amount of some £3,000,000 more. Experience had shown, moreover, that even in times of the most acute panic the paper issues of the bank had rarely or never been reduced below the level of £14,000,000, and this was accordingly the level fixed by Peel for the maximum amount of

[1] It is contended by Bagehot in his *Lombard Street* that the Bank of England differs in many essential respects from all other banks in the country. But the difference not being statutory, the statement in the text is true so far as the Act of 1844 is concerned.

notes to be issued by the bank irrespective of the coin or bullion held by it. The bank might always issue notes to the amount of £14,000,000 secured only by the permanent loan and the fluctuating amount of Government securities in its possession. This amount has now been increased in accordance with the provisions of the Act, by the decay of private bank issues which were restricted but not abolished by the Act, to about £16,500,000. Beyond that level the bank was empowered to issue notes only in exchange for gold deposited with it. For every pound and for every million pounds issued by the bank in notes beyond the fixed issue of £16,500,000, there always is and always must be gold stored in the bank to exchange on demand for notes. In other words, outside and beyond that level of reduced issue which, according to experience, can hardly be reached even at moments of extreme pressure, the issue department of the Bank of England is merely a deposit office where notes are given for gold and gold is exchanged for notes, the security of the holder of the note being the fact that the gold is always there and the note is merely a warrant for it. Experience having shown that the promise of the bank to pay was liable to failure when the bank found itself in difficulties, Peel secured the public creditor by providing not only that the gold should always be at hand to exchange for the note, but that the bank directors could as bankers and as dealing with their private customers never touch a penny of it. They could no more get it out of the issue department than they could take it from the mint or abstract it from the Treasury. The bank-note was thus rendered

instantaneously, automatically, and indefeasibly convertible.[1]

It has often been argued that the suspensions of the Bank Charter Act, which have taken place by authority of the Government subsequently indemnified by Parliament on three separate occasions of severe financial crisis in 1847, 1857, and 1866, are a proof of the unsoundness of its principles. In reality they can only be so represented by those who do not clearly understand either the purposes of the Act or the true reasons for its suspension. The Bank of England still enjoys the prestige it has derived from its long connection with the State. Though in its capacity of a bank proper it is no more than a private corporation, yet its failure to meet its obligations would assume the proportions of a national calamity. To such an institution public opinion and a sense of the public welfare, as involved in the maintenance of public credit, have seemed to require that when the bank is involved in serious difficulties the State should come to its assistance. This is what has been done on the three occasions when the Bank Charter Act has been suspended. The bank has been permitted to exceed for a time its statutory powers of issue for the purpose of sustaining the public credit,—the actual method employed being the issue of notes to customers of the banking department, at the discretion of the bank, without requiring the applicants to lodge

[1] Whether the note was also rendered as stable in exchangeable value as the number of pounds or the amount of bullion represented by its denomination is a question of great speculative and no little practical interest; but as this question does not arise out of the policy or theory of the Act of 1844, it is sufficient to refer to it here without further discussing it.

gold in the issue department corresponding in amount to the notes received. As a matter of fact, the suspension only became really operative on a single occasion in 1857, and then only to a trifling extent. On the two other occasions, though the bank was empowered to issue notes at its discretion, the actual issue never exceeded the amount of bullion and securities lodged in the issue department. The permission to suspend the Act restored confidence, and thus rendered an actual suspension unnecessary. What the State did was in effect to allow the reserve which was intended to maintain the convertibility of the note to be temporarily used to support the public credit.[1] Whether this was right or wrong in the circumstances, whether the bank is an institution so essential to the public credit as to require the intervention of the State to preserve it from failure, is a question of public expediency only to be determined by the circumstances of the particular case. It has little or nothing to do with the policy of the Bank Charter Act, which was not so much a bank Act as a bank-note Act, the main purpose and effect of which were to interpose the law as an insurmountable obstacle to the use by the bank directors for banking purposes of the gold and bullion deposited with them to preserve the convertibility of their notes.

It only remains in this chapter to deal with the budget of 1845. The budget of 1846, the last which was introduced by Peel's Government, was practically an episode of the conflict over the repeal of the corn laws, and need not be separately considered. Peel's financial measures, aided by wise administration and

[1] Sir John Lubbock, *Addresses*, p. 35.

the prudent and conciliatory conduct of foreign affairs, had gone far to restore the confidence of the country, and to revive its drooping prosperity. The year 1842 has been noted by historians as that in which, so far as the present century is concerned, the condition of England was, alike to the economist and to the philanthropist, most alarming and most hopeless. By 1845 much of the alarm had subsided, and the hopes of men were rising high for the future. It must be acknowledged that this change, the signs of which were everywhere manifest, was only partially due to the measures of Peel. The years in question were those which witnessed the first great impulse of railway enterprise in this country. The harvests had been abundant, and trade had responded in full measure to the large relaxations of import tariffs and protective duties effected in 1842. What Peel did was to take a statesmanlike advantage of these favourable conditions. Many causes have been assigned, according to the idiosyncrasy of individuals and their insight into the truth of things, for the repeal of the corn laws in 1846. Many causes unquestionably contributed to that result. Perhaps no cause was more potent, though its effect was hardly discerned at the time, and has not since been commonly recognised, than the imposition of the income-tax in 1842. Peel himself imposed this tax ostensibly for the purpose of restoring equilibrium to the national finances. He imposed it only for three years; but in the course of those three years it enabled him to try the crucial experiment of "fighting hostile tariffs with free imports," and by 1845 that experiment had proved so abundantly successful that he determined to maintain the tax for

the purpose of continuing it. "Sir Robert Peel, the shrewdest modern observer of passing events and of the temper of the times, thought the occasion one for a repetition on a larger scale of the experiment of 1842; and frankly acknowledging that there was no absolute financial necessity for his course, and that the supplies of the year might have been provided without resorting to additional taxation, announced his proposal of continuing the income-tax for a further period of three years,—'not for the purpose of providing the supplies for the year, but distinctly for the purpose of enabling us to make this great experiment of reducing other taxes.'"[1]

This was the essential feature of the budget of 1845. Even more than the budget of 1842 it was essentially a free trade budget, though it was less brilliant and less original as a stroke of financial genius, and it was as uncompromising as its predecessor in its refusal to give the nation's food a prerogative right to enjoy the advantage of the new experiment in taxation. But the reasons for this were not economical or financial; they were purely political, as Peel himself practically acknowledged. The net surplus obtained by the renewal of the income-tax was £3,409,000. Of this sum the minister employed £3,338,000 in remissions and reductions of taxation. The duty on sugar was largely reduced, though the differential advantage given to colonial sugar over foreign free-labour sugar was not materially lessened, and the prohibition of slave-grown sugar was maintained. All export duties were removed, including that on coal

[1] Sir Stafford Northcote, *Twenty Years of Financial Policy*, p. 64.

imposed by Peel himself in 1842. About 430 articles previously taxed at various rates were struck out of the tariff altogether, the total amount of loss to the revenue being only £320,000. The import duty on cotton, which had been heavily differential in favour of the colonies, was abandoned. The auction-duty, an occasion of much fraud and a very unequal tax on the transfer of property, was repealed, and the excise-duty on glass was abolished. Finally, the policy inaugurated in 1842 was further developed by the removal of all duties on raw materials except timber and tallow.

A budget such as this, though it showed the direction in which Peel's mind and policy were steadily advancing, could not, of course, satisfy those who demanded the total and immediate repeal of the corn laws. Peel was now a free trader in principle. He had long refrained from defending the corn laws on other grounds than those of temporary expediency. He was nevertheless still regarded by the opponents of the corn laws as the incarnation of protection. But the insidious contagion of right reason had taken firm hold of his mind. If events could have taken their normal course, there can be little doubt that Peel at the next general election would have declined to make himself responsible, as he had made himself responsible in 1841, for the permanent maintenance of a tax on the nation's food. Before the time came for the expiry of the renewed income-tax he would probably have avowed his conviction that the financial policy inaugurated in 1842 must be pursued to its natural and salutary issues, and have appealed for support in the new Parliament to the commerce and common-sense of the country

rather than to the agricultural interest. He might have succeeded or he might have failed. But his failure, combined with his avowed conversion, would have rendered the task of his successors easy and the repeal of the corn laws inevitable. We have now to see how the normal course of events was interrupted, and why Peel was compelled for the second time in his career to incur the reproach of apostasy.

CHAPTER IX

PEEL AND O'CONNELL

1841–1845

PEEL was placed in office in 1841 and entrusted with a powerful and docile majority for the purpose of doing two things. He was expected to repair the blunders of the Whigs, especially in finance, and to maintain the principle of protection as embodied in the tax upon corn. The two things were really incompatible, and the mandate issued from sources which had little or nothing in common. It was the common-sense of the country which called upon Peel, as the most capable statesman of his time, to repair the blunders of the Whigs; it was the mere interest of a class, sincere in its convictions but blinded in its reasoning by the passions of a threatened monopoly, which required him to maintain the corn laws. No man who has ever governed England was less likely than Peel to allow the latter influence to get the better of the former; but none was ever more certain to fight strenuously on the wrong side until his reason had finally gone over to the right. This antagonism, which constitutes at once the secret tragedy of Peel's inner life and the shining moral

of his public career, was masked for a time after his accession to power in 1841 by the irresistible glamour, to which Englishmen are pre-eminently sensitive, of a powerful majority led by a statesman of rare capacity and unrivalled repute; by the prudent and successful conduct of affairs both foreign and domestic; by the facile but not arrogant mastery with which Peel asserted and maintained his authority in the State, the Legislature, and the Cabinet; by his untiring industry in administration, and his unrivalled ascendency in debate. But it disclosed itself gradually, and from the outset there were two formidable obstacles in the path of the triumphant minister. One of these was Ireland, the standing difficulty of every administration of the century; the other was the corn laws and the growing antagonism of the country to their maintenance. Neither was insurmountable by itself to a statesman of Peel's capacity, courage, and resource. But associated together, and combined with that "supreme prejudice and sublime mediocrity"—to borrow a memorable phrase of Disraeli's—with which all governments strive incessantly, and rarely strive successfully in the long run, they brought about his overthrow.

Between Peel and O'Connell there had long existed an almost personal antagonism, dating from the time when Peel, as Irish Secretary, had sent a challenge to the popular leader. Since those days, when both were young, O'Connell had established his claim and that of all other Catholics to civil equality in the State, had made himself the trusted leader of the Irish people, had fought his way to the House of Commons, overthrowing one Ministry by shattering the party which

supported it, dislocating another, and dominating a third, and had made a position for himself in that assembly unprecedented in the long and painful history of the relations between England and Ireland. This unrivalled popular leader, eloquent, passionate, volcanic, irresistible, politic, and sagacious, but not over-scrupulous, will perhaps always be represented, according to the bias of his critics, either as a demagogue with many of the gifts of a statesman, or as a statesman with some of the vices of a demagogue. Probably both representations are true according as his character and career are looked at from the English or the Irish point of view. Endowed with all the gifts and many of the failings of the Celtic nature, the parliamentary champion of a race which England had often oppressed and never cared to understand, O'Connell never managed to conform, perhaps he never cared to conform to the accepted standards of political propriety in England. On one side of St. George's Channel he was an absolute monarch whose lightest word was obeyed by millions of devoted subjects. On the other he was socially an outcast and politically an incubus. Such a man placed in such a position is not to be gauged by the standards which Englishmen apply to their own public men. If he gave back reviling for reviling, if he requited contumely with vituperation, even if he met treachery, as he thought it, with treason, as his adversaries called it, perhaps in the sum of things he may be held to have been as much sinned against as sinning. The course of English history has often presented opposing statesmen in almost ideal contrast of character, temperament, and correspondence with different phases of

the national genius; perhaps no such contrast was ever so ideal, so profoundly typical of those melancholy misunderstandings, those insidious incompatibilities, which have kept England and Ireland asunder, as that between Peel and O'Connell.'

We have seen how Peel answered O'Connell's motion for repeal in 1834, and assisted the Government of the day to defeat it, and how O'Connell, in accordance with the terms of what was known as the "Lichfield House Compact," held his demand for repeal in abeyance during the second administration of Melbourne. In 1841 O'Connell once more saw his old antagonist in office at the head of a powerful majority. He saw among his colleagues Stanley, the author of the Coercion Act of 1833, the uncompromising champion of the Irish Protestant Church, towards whom his antagonism was hardly less embittered and less personal than it was towards Peel himself. He could not but perceive that the policy of Peel towards Ireland involved the practical restoration of that Protestant ascendency which had been broken or at least suspended under the rule of Thomas Drummond and his official chiefs. He accordingly determined to raise once more the standard of repeal. He was not, perhaps, altogether a free agent in the matter. New forces were at work in Ireland, less Catholic and more cosmopolitan than those which the Liberator himself had directed or controlled, and they found their political expression in what was known as the "Young Ireland" movement. O'Connell's hand was forced neither quite willingly nor altogether unwillingly, and he revived a repeal Association and made fresh appeals for a repeal rent.

The movement was promoted by "monster meetings" at which O'Connell once more displayed his marvellous powers of oratory and his sympathetic ascendency over vast masses of his countrymen. Ireland, in fact, was once more beginning to show that it could not be governed on the principles which O'Connell had forced Peel to abandon in 1829. But Peel was slow to make a change. The reasons for his hesitation are more intelligible to students of English party politics than creditable to his political sagacity. He was not unaware when his Government was formed that Ireland would be his difficulty. But he lacked the force, not of character but of party, that would have enabled him to deal with it. That force can only come from a statesman who makes Ireland the lodestar of his whole policy, who recognises that with Ireland discontented England cannot be tranquil nor her progress normal, or from circumstances whose urgency forbids neglect or delay. The pity of it is that in both cases it is apt for want of knowledge to be misdirected, and for want of sympathy to be misapplied.

One politician in those days, whose political sagacity, enlightened by his alien birth and his freedom from English prejudices, was perhaps quickened by his hatred of Peel, propounded the Irish question in language that has become historic. "What," he asked, "did this eternal Irish question mean? One said it was a physical question, another a spiritual question. Now it was the absence of an aristocracy, then the absence of railroads. It was the Pope one day, potatoes the next. . . . They had a starving population, an absentee aristocracy, and an alien Church, and in addition, the weakest executive

in the world. That was the Irish question. Well, then, what would honourable gentlemen say if they were reading of a country in that position? They would say at once 'the remedy was revolution.' But Ireland could not have a revolution; and why? Because Ireland was connected with another and more powerful country. . . . What, then, was the duty of an English minister? To effect by his policy all those changes which a revolution would do by force. That was the Irish question in its integrity." But Disraeli was afterwards to discover that the English people do not readily rise to the height of a vicarious and merely politic revolution. They reserve their revolutionary passions for the redress of their own grievances; and English ministers, who know the temper of their own countrymen, have long learnt to anticipate revolution by concession.

The growing agitation for repeal might have been met and stayed by a far-sighted minister and a sympathetic Parliament. But both conditions were wanting. The minister lacked foresight, and the Parliament lacked sympathy. The repeal movement was no mere revolutionary ebullition of the "blind hysterics of the Celt." It was the passionate cry of a nation neglected in its distress. To listen to O'Connell, to come to terms with Young Ireland, might have been impossible to Peel and the Parliament of 1841. It was not impossible to listen to the warnings of Smith O'Brien, a Protestant landlord, and not yet a rebel nor even a repealer, of Sharman Crawford, the member for Rochdale, and a landed proprietor in Ulster, and of Poulett Scrope, an English landlord, and member of

Parliament for another English constituency. These and similar warnings were, however, addressed to deaf ears, and as in the elections of 1841 the repeal agitation had seemed to languish—O'Connell himself losing his seat for Dublin, though in the following year he was chosen the first Catholic lord mayor of the city—the apparent tranquillity of Ireland left ministers free to neglect its grievances and ignore its distress. The inevitable consequences followed. Ireland soon began to assume that attitude of veiled rebellion, which, in default of a statesman ready, as Disraeli said, to effect by his policy all that a revolution would do by force, seems to be its only available weapon. O'Connell, who remembered how Peel had been forced to yield in 1829, began to declare that 1843 would be the repeal year. Men of substance and sobriety, to whom the revolutionary temper was as alien as to any Englishman, began to show their sense of their country's grievances by attending repeal meetings. The Government answered by striking the names of such of them as were magistrates off the Commission of the Peace. The only effect was that several magistrates resigned their commissions in order to be free to attend the meetings, and voluntary courts of conciliation were established all over the country to take the place of the ordinary courts of local jurisdiction administered by anti-repeal magistrates. The repeal rent grew to enormous sums, and the whole country was filled with hope, agitation, and enthusiasm. Unhappily the agitation was accompanied, as it often, perhaps always, is in Ireland by an increase of crime. Whether this was due to the agitation itself, or to the grievances

which caused the agitation and fed it, is a question which no historian can answer one way or the other without being accused of partiality by those who happen to think otherwise.

In 1843 the situation was found to be so serious that the Government introduced an Arms Act. It was passed after occupying three months of the session. It did not, however, stop the monster meetings nor stay the repeal agitation. In the autumn O'Connell projected a great meeting to be held at Clontarf on Dublin Bay, the historic scene of the victory obtained over the Danes by the national hero Brian Boroimhe. The Government, at almost the last moment, proclaimed and prohibited the meeting. O'Connell, whose abhorrence of violence and bloodshed was held by some to amount to physical cowardice, resolved, not without a struggle with the Young Ireland party, to obey the Government, to countermand the summons, and to do his utmost to persuade his followers not to attend the meeting. A great conflict was averted by the forbearance of O'Connell himself and his strenuous efforts to make others forbear He was rewarded by being arrested a few days afterwards together with his principal associates on a charge of conspiracy. After a prolonged trial the traversers were convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. The trial was memorable for many things—for the prodigious length and inconsequent reasoning of the indictment; for the packing of the jury, a phrase which is justified in this instance at any rate by the historic declaration of Lord Chief Justice Denman that "if such a practice should be allowed to pass without a remedy, trial by jury will be a mockery, a delusion, and a snare",

and for the flagrant partiality of the presiding judge, Pennefather, who in his charge to the jury had spoken of the counsel for the defence as "the gentlemen on the other side." An appeal was made to the House of Lords, and in September 1844 the judgment was set aside by the votes of Cottenham, Denman, and Campbell against those of Lyndhurst and Brougham. The traversers had been imprisoned in the meanwhile, but their imprisonment had almost taken the form of a popular demonstration, and their release was a scene of triumph. Nevertheless, this was practically the end of O'Connell's public career. He was growing old, his health was failing, his ascendency was threatened by the growing influence of Young Ireland, and his prestige had suffered by his surrender at Clontarf.

In his last encounter with O'Connell Peel had thus seemed to win an easy and decisive victory. He seems scarcely to have thought so himself. Though Graham his principal lieutenant had declared in 1843, in a speech of characteristic imprudence for which he subsequently apologised, that concession to Ireland had reached its utmost limits, the conflict with O'Connell convinced Peel that the grievances of Ireland must be seriously examined and at least an attempt made to redress them. Already in 1843 a Royal Commission had been appointed to inquire into the "state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland." This was the celebrated Devon Commission, whose Report, presented in 1845, marks a memorable and melancholy epoch—memorable as the first authoritative disclosure of Irish agrarian grievances, melancholy because so long an interval was suffered to elapse between

the disclosure of the grievances and their redress. It is true that in 1845 Stanley, now sitting in the House of Lords, introduced a measure into that assembly founded on some of the recommendations of the Devon Commission. But its fate was significant. At first the Lords scarcely condescended to look at the Bill, and Stanley only succeeded with difficulty in procuring its reference to a select committee. There it was smothered. Stanley withdrew it, undertaking to introduce it in another shape and at a more convenient time. That time never came. The agrarian history of Ireland for the last forty years is the price which the State has had to pay for the contemptuous neglect by the House of Lords of the sibylline Report of the Devon Commission.

In another direction, however, Peel's measures of concession to Ireland were more successful, though his success was of that kind which by offending many interests and prejudices, especially those of his own supporters, was certain to lead to his own downfall in the end. In 1844 he had increased the vote for Irish Education, and had passed a measure intended to conciliate Catholic feeling by introducing a Catholic element into the Commission charged with the administration of Charitable Bequests in Ireland. At the same time the Irish executive was changed by the retirement of Lord de Grey, and the appointment of Lord Heytesbury in his place as Viceroy, and the nomination of Sir Thomas Fremantle as Chief Secretary in the room of Lord Eliot, who had succeeded to the peerage. In 1845 the minister resolved to make a serious attempt for the improvement of the higher education in Ireland, irrespective of creed

or sect, and for the more effective education of candidates for the Irish priesthood. The measures adopted were an increase of the grant to Maynooth from £9000 annually, the sum at which it had been fixed in 1808 to about £26,000, and the establishment of the Queen's Colleges at Belfast, Galway, and Cork on a non-sectarian basis. These colleges were dubbed at the time "godless" colleges, and the opprobrious nickname has stuck to them since, though the prejudice which gave it has long since subsided into insignificance. By these measures Peel excited and defied some of the most unlovely prejudices and some of the least amiable passions of the English religious nature. Against the increase of the grant to Maynooth a furious agitation raged throughout the land. Parliament was flooded with petitions, and the whole country overflowed with bigotry and fanaticism. "Inglis, who had been returned for Oxford in 1829, led the Opposition. Thinking he had got an exclusive monopoly of truth, he objected to what he called the endowment of error. The English Churchman and Scotch Presbyterian joined, heart and soul, in assailing Peel. One popular preacher compared the English minister to the young man void of understanding, who fell a victim to a woman with the attire of an harlot. Some Scotch petitioners declared that the signs of the withdrawal of heavenly favour from the country had not been wanting since the Act of 1829. It was high treason to heaven to apply the revenue of a Protestant people to the education of a Popish priesthood. An English orator, in language almost as forcible, declared that any one who assented to the grant worshipped the beast, and supported that clearly pre

dicted apostasy which opens its mouth in blasphemy against God, has ever been at war with the saints, and conspires afresh against our Lord and Saviour. 'The Orangeman raises his howl,' said Macaulay, 'and Exeter Hall sets up its bray, and Mr. MacNeile is horrified to think that a still larger grant is intended for the priests of Baal at the table of Jezebel, and the Protestant operatives of Dublin call for the impeachment of ministers in exceedingly bad English.' A few years later a man who was both a Christian and a gentleman, declared the Irish famine to be a dispensation of Providence in return for the Maynooth grant."[1]

Peel was not the man to yield to this sort of clamour. Sincerely attached to the Church of England, its doctrines and its liturgy, he was altogether Erastian in his views of the relations of Church and State, and constitutionally impervious alike to the bigotry of vulgar Protestantism and to the new leaven of the Oxford movement, then in full career. Probably he never fully appreciated the motives which induced Mr. Gladstone to sever himself from the Government on the question of the Maynooth grant. Mr. Gladstone decided on grounds of public policy to support the measure; but in his well-known book on Church and State he had expressed opinions inconsistent with it, and, with an almost quixotic regard for the public consistency of public men, he thought it his duty not to remain a member of the Ministry responsible for its introduction. Peel's mind moved in a different order of ideas. He looked with a single eye to the peace of Ireland and the welfare of the State. So long as his judgment was convinced that the course

[1] Walpole, *History of England*, vol. iv. p. 249.

he was taking was the right one, he would never have allowed an over-strained sense of consistency to interfere with the paramount duty of pursuing it. The motives which actuated him, sufficient in themselves, though perhaps hardly allowed sufficient scope in their operation, may be seen in the following memorable and significant passages from his speech on the second reading of the Maynooth Bill: "With me every feeling as to the imputation of consistency, every feeling with regard to the suspicions thrown upon the sincerity of the Government, every other feeling is subordinate to one—my desire that you should not reject this measure. I do not regret the course I have taken. I know not what the consequences may be in respect to the more kindly relations between Ireland and this country. It has produced in the minds of a generous people a kindly and a grateful feeling. . . . I call on you to recollect that you are responsible for the peace of Ireland. I say you must break up, in some way or other, that formidable confederacy which exists in that country against the British Government and the British connection. I do not believe you can break it up by force. . . . You can do much to break it up by acting in a spirit of kindness, forbearance, and generosity . . . On the far horizon of the west there rises a cloud—a cloud small indeed, but threatening future storms. It became my duty on the part of the Government . . . temperately but distinctly to state that while we are most anxious for an adjustment of the impending difficulties, while we will leave nothing undone to effect an amicable settlement, yet I did feel it to be part of my duty—of the duty of the first minister of the Crown—to state

that if our rights be invaded we were determined and prepared to maintain them. I own, sir, that when I was called upon to make that declaration I did recollect with satisfaction and consolation that the day before I had sent a message of peace to Ireland."

CHAPTER X

THE REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS

1845–1846

THE minister had triumphed, and his policy, meagre as it was, had prevailed. But the nemesis was at hand. Supreme prejudice and sublime mediocrity were banding themselves together against the statesman who had dared for the second time in his career to postpone party to the State. In the speech quoted in the last chapter Peel had plainly intimated a doubt whether in the event of some great crisis—such as war with the United States over the boundary disputes of the time—he would remain at the head of affairs. The particular crisis he foresaw was averted by his own temperate firmness and that of his Foreign Secretary. But another crisis was at hand. The corn laws were *in extremis*. The power and influence of the anti-Corn-Law League were advancing by leaps and bounds. Peel himself had long abandoned protection as a principle, and only maintained it as a matter of expediency, waiting, no doubt, until a general election should free him from his bondage to its supporters. But a policy of expectancy, always precarious in politics, was, in the economical

conditions then prevailing in England, altogether at the mercy of the weather and crops of a single year. The harvest of 1845 betrayed Peel just as ten years later "General Février" turned traitor to the Emperor Nicolas. The spectre of national scarcity began to stalk through the land, and to haunt the minister as he meditated in tragic isolation on the stern ironies and inexorable retributions of public duty. In England the summer was wet, and the harvest was scanty. In Ireland a mysterious malady suddenly attacked the potato, and destroyed the food of the people.

There is no arguing with an empty belly. Famine is no respecter of parties, and a starving people cannot wait for the calculations of statesmen to mature. Theoretically protection had long since been dead, and Peel himself had more than once written its epitaph; practically it still stood between the people and that "abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened with a sense of injustice," which Peel, to his everlasting honour, secured for his countrymen by the sacrifice of his party and the surrender of himself. It would be unnecessary, even if it were possible, to trace in these pages the history of the anti-Corn-Law League, its long conflict, and its triumphant victory. There is no episode in modern English history more familiar in all its details to every one who studies politics, and none which, on the whole, has been more fortunate in its historians. It must suffice to say that though in every session from 1841 to 1845 Peel had stoutly withstood the agitation of the League, and had strenuously opposed the annual resolution proposed by Mr. Villiers in favour of the total and immediate

repeal of the corn laws, yet he had by his budgets surrendered the whole principle of protection, and in his speeches acknowledged that the protective duties on corn rested on exceptional, and not necessarily permanent grounds of assumed expediency. It would be idle to attempt to determine exactly at what time these new views took firm hold of his mind, or in what way he would ultimately have given effect to them if the prospect of famine in Ireland had not compelled him to adopt a policy which, from a party point of view, was premature, and only to be defended on the grounds of urgent necessity. But we know, at any rate, that the agitation of the League, or, as he himself phrased it, "the conflict of arguments on the principle of a restrictive policy," had produced a profound impression upon him. As he told his constituents in 1847, "My confidence in the validity of the reasons on which I had myself heretofore relied for the maintenance of restrictions on the import of corn had been materially weakened. It had been weakened by the conflict of arguments on the principle of a restrictive policy; by many concurring proofs that the wages of labour do not vary with the price of corn; by the contrast presented in two successive periods of dearth and abundance in the health, morals, and tranquillity, and general prosperity of the whole community; by serious doubts whether, in the present condition of this country, cheapness and plenty are not ensured for the future in a higher degree by the free intercourse in corn than by restrictions on its importation for the purpose of giving protection to domestic agriculture." This passage puts the whole argument for free trade in corn in a nutshell.

But before that argument could be driven home in those recesses of Peel's mind where reason reigned supreme it was necessary that the leaders of the anti-Corn-Law League and the parliamentary advocates of free trade should spend five years in incessant toil, agitation, persuasion, and conflict.

The principal parliamentary advocates of free trade, the men with whom Peel contended so long and so valiantly for the sake of a cause which he knew in his heart to be lost, were four in number. Two sprung from the aristocracy, but qualified by a higher title than that of birth to adorn and lead the senate, Mr. Charles Villiers and Lord Howick, are still amongst us almost the sole survivors with Mr. Gladstone of the great conflict which ended Peel's career as a minister. Two others sprung from the ranks of the people, and driven into public life by the overmastering impulse of a great popular cause, Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright, have passed away. Of those who survive, it is perhaps becoming to speak with some restraint, though even posthumous frankness will have nothing but praise to give them. A modern politician, not born when the corn laws were repealed, once thought proper to say that the contemporaries and comrades of Mr. Villiers in the great conflict had appropriated his due share of the glories of their common victory. "When Mr. Villiers had won the day, Mr. Bright and his dear friend Mr. Cobden stepped in and tried to rob him of all his glory." Mr. Bright and Mr. Cobden never did anything of the kind. The credit was justly given to Cobden alike by his associates in the conflict and by Sir Robert Peel himself; and no one had better reason to know than Mr. Villiers

that the battle of the corn laws was won, not by the arguments used in Parliament, still less by the divisions which closed the debates, but by the irresistible persuasion addressed direct by Cobden, Bright, and the other orators of the League, to the reason and conscience of their countrymen. Even among the orators of the League, Cobden himself was hardly the most persuasive nor Bright the most eloquent; on the particular topic of the corn laws and in its presentation to a popular audience both were perhaps surpassed by W. J. Fox, sometime member for Oldham, whose name is now almost forgotten. But however this may be, it was the League which won the battle of the corn laws, and Cobden and Bright were the two most conspicuous generals in that victorious campaign. What Mr. Villiers and Lord Howick did, was to present not merely the popular arguments of the League, but the more scientific conclusions of sound economy in the best parliamentary form, clear, incisive, copious, cogent with an authority which the House of Commons of those days accorded to men of high birth and conspicuous station, though it refused it to mere manufacturers and traders.

Lord Howick almost rivalled Cobden himself in his faculty of rendering abstract reasoning luminous, transparent, and irresistible, and he brought to the cause he espoused the invaluable prestige of the purest Whig orthodoxy, of a name indelibly associated with popular triumphs, of high courage and inflexible integrity, of an austere personality and an uncompromising elevation of aim. Mr. Villiers, on the other hand, was a man who, if his political temper had been less earnest, less strenuous, and less faithful to public duty, might have been tempted

to let free trade take care of itself. Exceptionally fitted by birth and breeding, associated with a keen intellect and a caustic wit, to shine in the social world, he might have enjoyed all that such a world has to give, undistracted by a movement which in that world was regarded as vulgar, violent, dangerous, and disreputable. But he preferred to scorn delights and live laborious days in the disinterested service of the people; he never flinched in his fidelity to the cause he had espoused, and his own share in its triumph—conspicuous and indispensable, but certainly not paramount—is entitled to the ungrudging recognition of history.

The name of Cobden is associated for ever with the repeal of the corn laws. That of Bright is indelibly imprinted on the hearts and memories of his countrymen. Of all the results of the Reform Act of 1832 none was perhaps more memorable or more significant than the entry of Cobden into the House of Commons, bringing with him a spirit and an influence which have changed the whole temper of English public life. "Great economic and social forces," says his biographer, "flow with a tidal sweep over communities that are only half-conscious of that which is befalling them. Wise statesmen are those who foresee what time is thus bringing, and endeavour to shape institutions, and to mould men's thought and purpose in accordance with the change that is silently surrounding them. To this type Cobden by his character and influence belonged." And lest this language should seem to be the extravagance of biographical eulogy, it may profitably be compared with what Disraeli said of Cobden at the time of his death. "There are some members of Parliament,

who though they may not be present, are still members of this House, are independent of dissolutions, of the caprices of constituencies, and even of the course of time. I think that Mr. Cobden was one of these men." Bright was a man of less catholic temper, less comprehensive gifts. But his singleness of aim, his combative spirit—it was wittily said of him that if he had not been a Quaker he must have been a prize-fighter—his superb eloquence,—unsurpassed for purity and nobility of language, for spontaneous grace of gesture and native majesty of intonation, for pathos, for humour, and for a command of imagery at once simple and direct, and withal profoundly appropriate and impressive,—his sympathetic insight into the sober, serious, righteous gravity of the English character, his noble scorn of wrong and his inflexible love of right, made him an irresistible advocate and an indispensable ally. If the popular instinct and the testimony of contemporaries are wrong, if the labours and advocacy of these two men did not transcend all other agencies in the repeal of the corn laws, history is a falsehood and character is naught.

It must here be assumed, for the sake of brevity, that at the close of the session of 1845 protection was, as Disraeli had said not long before in one of his relentless attacks on Peel, "in the same condition that Protestantism was in 1828." In March of that year Cobden had made his celebrated "dairy-farming" speech—a speech which so impressed and disturbed Peel as he listened to it that he crumpled up the notes he had been taking with intent to reply, and turning to Sidney Herbert said, "*You* must answer this for *I* cannot." Of

the long struggle which this memorable speech of Cobden's virtually ended no detailed narrative can be given here, but one episode must be mentioned because it directly bears on Peel's personal history. Shortly before the opening of the session of 1843 Mr. Edward Drummond, Peel's private secretary, was shot in Whitehall by a crazy Scotchman named Macnaghten, who was thought by many to have mistaken the secretary for the minister. Drummond died of the wound a few days afterwards. Peel was deeply affected by this occurrence, which naturally shocked and excited the country. Early in the session, in speaking on a motion proposed by Lord Howick concerning the state of the country and the prevailing distress, Cobden used the following language: "I must tell the right hon. baronet that it is the duty of every honest and independent member to hold him individually responsible for the present condition of the country." As Cobden sat down the minister rose to reply. Impassive in general, self-centred and self-absorbed, Peel was deeply agitated on this occasion, and his agitation communicated itself to the crowded and expectant House. "The honourable gentleman," he began, "has stated here very emphatically what he has more than once stated at the conferences of the anti-Corn-Law League, that he holds me individually"—here there was intense excitement and vehement interruption, "individually responsible for the distress and suffering of the country, that he holds me personally responsible. But be the consequences of these insinuations what they may, never will I be influenced by menaces, either in this House or out of this House, to adopt a course which I consider"—here the interruption was renewed and the

sentence was never completed. Cobden strove in vain to brave the storm and to offer an explanation, but his words were drowned in the clamour of the House, and for the time he was silenced by its frantic animosity. The speech of the minister which followed this exciting scene was closely reasoned and dispassionate, and showed no further trace of the agitation with which it began. At its close Cobden again tendered his interrupted explanation, which was not very graciously received. At a distance of nearly fifty years it is difficult to enter into the passions and misunderstandings of this remarkable scene. Many thought at the time that Peel's agitation was simulated—there never was a more consummate master of the histrionics of debate—in order to take advantage of the popular excitement of the hour, and to damage a very formidable opponent. It is more probable that Peel, who was intensely sensitive, intensely passionate, and intensely self-conscious, was temporarily thrown off his balance by private sorrow and public anxiety, and allowed himself to be betrayed into an unwonted display of overstrained apprehension and unfounded misunderstanding, both real at the time, and both afterwards frankly and generously disavowed.

It was confidently asserted by Croker, whose long friendship with Peel was terminated by the repeal of the corn laws, that the failure of the potato crop in Ireland was only a pretext, and that Peel's real motive for his change of policy was terror at the growing power of the League. The power of the League would have had no terrors for Peel if he had not become gradually convinced that it was based on reason and the truth of things. To mere clamour and agitation he would have

opposed a dauntless front. To the League he might have said—

Non me tua fervida terrent
Dicta, ferox ; dî me terrent et Jupiter hostis.

The divinity enshrined in the innermost recesses of Peel's nature was intellectual sincerity; to this he rendered unswerving homage and unfaltering obedience. It was always certain that when once his reason was convinced his action would sooner or later conform to it, and it is on record that in 1845 he had become convinced that the corn laws could not be permanently maintained. "It was my intention," he says in his *Memoirs*, "but for the unforeseen events of the autumn of 1845, to enter into that friendly communication, the absence of which is blamed and lamented, to apprise the Conservative party, before the corn law could be discussed in the session of 1846, that my views with regard to the policy of maintaining that law had undergone a change, and that I could no longer undertake as a minister to resist a motion for the consideration of the whole question." So far then, it is true, that even if there had been no potato famine the question of the corn laws would, by Peel's own action, have entered on a totally new phase in 1846. On the other hand, it is equally clear that the course of action contemplated by him was anticipated and frustrated by the failure of the potato. "I cannot doubt," said Wellington writing to Croker, "that which passed under my own view and frequent observation day by day. I mean the alarms of the consequences in Ireland of the potato disease. I never witnessed in any case such agony." Croker replied, with a lack of insight into Peel's character

which discredits his friendship, and a lack of charity which explains his reputation for malignity, "The agony was real and intense, but it was the agony of a man who was deluding and betraying his conscience and his colleagues."

At any rate it is certain that in the autumn of 1845 the public anxiety and alarm were such that no Government could have neglected them without a grave breach of public duty. The matter had long engaged the earnest solicitude of Peel and Graham when the Cabinet was summoned to consider it on the last day of October. It met again on the following day, when Peel, having laid before his colleagues the information in his possession, insisted upon the gravity of the crisis, especially in its bearing on the corn laws, and propounded the alternatives which presented themselves to his mind for dealing with it. Nothing was decided, and the Cabinet adjourned to the following week. It had already become evident, says Peel in his *Memoirs*, "that very serious differences of opinion existed as to the necessity for adopting any extraordinary measures, and as to the character of the measures which it might be advisable to adopt." On the reassembling of the Cabinet the Prime Minister proposed to suspend by Order in Council the duties on the importation of grain, to summon Parliament on the 27th to sanction the Order, and then to adjourn with an intimation that immediately after the recess Parliament would be invited to consider a modification of the existing law. Only three of his colleagues, Lord Aberdeen, Sir James Graham, and Mr. Sidney Herbert, supported these proposals of the minister, and the Cabinet adjourned till the end of the month. In

the meanwhile a large order was secretly given, on behalf of the Treasury, for the purchase of Indian corn and meal in the markets of the United States, as a temporary provision against immediate scarcity in Ireland.

It might perhaps have been well if Peel had resolved to resign at once when the Cabinet declined to adopt the measures he proposed. But a minister does not readily yield to the first serious difference with his colleagues, nor hastily abandon a position of public trust at a moment of grave perplexity. It was doubtful whether the Whigs could form a government. It was certain that a ministerial interregnum must disturb the public mind and imperil the welfare of the State. In the meanwhile the Opposition was not idle. Lord John Russell had been watching the course of public affairs with vigilant eye, and on 27th November his celebrated letter was published, dated from Edinburgh on 22d November, and addressed to his constituents the electors of the City of London. He abandoned the fixed moderate duty which had hitherto been the official platform of the Opposition—"a tableland ending in a precipice," Mr. Gladstone had called it—and declared for total repeal. "Let us unite," he said, "and put an end to a system which has been proved to be the blight of commerce, the bane of agriculture, the source of bitter divisions among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality, and crime among the people. . . . The Government appear to be waiting for some excuse to give up the present corn law. Let the people by petition, by address, by remonstrance afford them the excuse they seek."

On 25th November the Cabinet met again and agreed

upon instructions to be issued to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. On the following day Peel informed his colleagues in a written memorandum that he could not consent to the issue of these instructions and undertake at the same time to maintain the existing corn law. "Suspension," he said, "will compel a deliberate review of the whole question of agricultural protection. I firmly believe that it would be better for the country that that review should be undertaken by others. Under ordinary circumstances I should advise that it should be so undertaken; but I look now to the immediate emergency and to the duties it imposes on a minister. I am ready to take the responsibility of that emergency if the opinions of my colleagues as to the extent of the evil and the nature of the remedy concur with mine." The remedy now suggested was described in a subsequent memorandum as a suspension of the existing law, to be followed by the introduction of a measure "founded upon the principle of the present law while it continues in operation, but in the course of that operation ensuring the ultimate and not remote extinction of protective duties. I will," continued Peel, "undertake to propose such a law, and should hope to be enabled to carry it if it meets with the cordial and unanimous assent of my colleagues." In this latter memorandum, which is dated 2d December, the influence of Lord John Russell's Edinburgh letter may perhaps be traced. But Peel's colleagues were neither cordial nor unanimous. Some, making a virtue of necessity, consented to support the minister. Wellington had already bluntly said: "In respect to my own course, my only object in public life is to support Sir Robert Peel's

administration of the government for the queen. A good government for the country is more important than corn laws or any other consideration." But the final result of those four Cabinet councils in one week, which, as Disraeli said, "agitated England, perplexed the sagacious Tuileries, and disturbed even the serene intelligence of the profound Metternich," was that Stanley and the Duke of Buccleuch declared that they could not support the measures contemplated by the minister. Peel thereupon resolved to resign.

The Ministry was now at an end. Lord John Russell was summoned to Osborne and invited to take the place of the retiring minister. After surmounting many difficulties incidental to the position of a party in a minority, and others arising out of the grave perplexities of the moment, Lord John Russell found himself confronted at the last moment with a difficulty which proved insuperable, in the shape of a simultaneous refusal on the part of Lord Grey (as Lord Howick had now become) to take office if Lord Palmerston became Foreign Secretary, and of Lord Palmerston to accept any other office.[1] Peel was, in consequence, summoned by the queen to resume his office, and to reconstruct his Ministry. It had already been ascertained that Stanley was not prepared to form a Government on the basis of Protection, and the Whigs having failed, the only remaining alternatives were Peel and Cobden. The latter alternative would have seemed in those days to be

[1] A full account of this crisis, so far as it concerned Lord Grey, together with the correspondence which passed on the occasion, was given, with the sanction of Lord Grey, by the present writer in an article on the Greville Memoirs which appeared in the first number of the *English Historical Review*.

tantamount to revolution, and even the historian must acknowledge that, however fitted in the abstract to guide the destinies of the State, Cobden could not have succeeded where Lord John Russell had failed. But Peel did not hesitate. In 1834 he had accepted the office of Prime Minister at the hands of William IV before consulting or even seeing any of his colleagues. In 1845 he followed his own precedent, and returned to London First Minister of the Crown, resolved at all hazards to pursue his own course, and, if his colleagues deserted him, to find colleagues where he could. With the exception of Stanley, however, who adhered to the views which had brought about the crisis, all his colleagues resumed office with him, the Duke of Buccleuch consenting to subordinate his personal opinions to the requirements of State necessity. The retirement of Stanley and the death of Lord Wharncliffe, which occurred at this moment, involved some ministerial changes, one of the results of which was the return of Mr. Gladstone to the Ministry and his entry into the Cabinet as Secretary of State for the Colonies. But as he failed to secure his re-election for Newark, the Duke of Newcastle, an ardent protectionist, having withdrawn his support, Mr. Gladstone was absent from the House of Commons throughout the momentous and exciting debates of the ensuing session.

The foregoing description of Peel's conduct and motives during the crisis of 1845, though necessarily brief and therefore so far imperfect, has been given as far as possible in the statesman's own words. Many questions are suggested by it, and much controversy has arisen; but the paramount question of all, that

namely, which concerns the extent to which a statesman may sacrifice party confidence and personal consistency to the demands of public duty as he conceives and understands them, is one to which no student of constitutional history in this country will give an answer unfavourable to Peel without grave hesitation and misgiving. It belongs to the casuistry of politics, and, like other questions of casuistry, it must be decided, not by abstract principle, but by a patient, dispassionate, and discriminating examination of all the circumstances of the case. Party is a great instrument of government, and confidence is the cement of party; personal consistency is a great endowment in a statesman. But party is only a great instrument if it is subordinate to patriotism, and a lack of statesmanlike foresight cannot be redeemed by obstinate persistency in acknowledged error. Perhaps the example of statesmen who have shown, at the cost of much temporary obloquy, that party confidence and personal consistency must, on occasion, be sacrificed to the paramount demands of public duty, may be recognised by the constitutional historian as one of the redeeming features of that system of party government which is practically so convenient and theoretically so absurd.

Peel now resolved, and his colleagues agreed, that the measure to be introduced for dealing with the corn laws must be one which should finally settle the question, although its complete operation might for a time be postponed. He could count on a majority to support him in the House of Commons in spite of the anticipated revolt of the ultra-protectionist party, because the leaders of the regular Opposition were now united

with the supporters of the League in demanding total repeal. In the House of Lords, although many powerful peers were alienated and were showing their animosity by opposing and preventing the re-election of Peel's new colleagues, he reckoned on the influence of Wellington and his other colleagues to secure sufficient support for his measures. As soon as his plans became known the agitation, confusion, and dismay were intense. The protectionists were furious, but at first impotent in their fury. They had no leaders until Lord George Bentinck and Disraeli came to their rescue—a combination as unexpected as it was formidable between an unimpeachable representative of the country gentlemen of England and one who was at that time regarded as a political adventurer, though he was soon to show that he was a political strategist of consummate genius and a political gladiator of unrivalled skill in fence. Disraeli's envenomed attacks on Peel, incessantly delivered, and timed with relentless ingenuity of torture, stung the minister to the quick. At times he writhed in visible agony, while his alienated followers watched the spectacle in vindictive silence, unmoved at the tragedy, not displeased with the retribution, nor ashamed of the instrument which inflicted it.

The session of 1846 is one of the most memorable in the parliamentary annals of our time. The Queen's Speech invited the attention of Parliament to the condition of Ireland, and announced the introduction of a Coercion Bill. It also announced further proposals for the removal of protective duties, and this announcement was, in accordance with general expectation, explained by the mover and seconder of the Address,

and afterwards by the Prime Minister himself, to signify the abolition of the Corn Laws. Peel adroitly described the measure as little more than a development of the fiscal policy of 1842 and 1845, and accompanied it with promises to consider the readjustment of the existing burdens on land. But the Protectionists were not deceived. At first they were stunned, and it was not until Lord George Bentinck, prompted by Disraeli, had had time to mature his plans, and to take a malign advantage of the ministerial difficulties in regard to Ireland, that they began to hope for immediate vengeance on the minister who, in their eyes, had betrayed them. The Coercion Bill, introduced in the House of Lords, soon passed that assembly, and on its reaching the House of Commons it was read a first time with the concurrence and support of the Opposition. The condition of Ireland had grown serious; distress had been followed by crime, and coercion was the accepted remedy of both parties for agrarian crime in Ireland. The Opposition, however, contended that exceptional repressive legislation ought to be accompanied by a recognition of Irish grievances, and a legislative attempt to remedy them. Here Disraeli saw his opportunity. If the Coercion Bill were pressed forward as a measure urgently required for the maintenance of peace in Ireland, the resistance of the Opposition reinforced by O'Connell and his followers might involve the delay and ultimate defeat of the Corn and Customs Bill, as the measure was designated. If on the other hand the Corn and Customs Bill was given precedence over the Coercion Bill, ministers would be estopped from contending that the condition of affairs in Ireland was so serious and so

urgent as to require all good citizens to support the executive Government, and the Opposition might be persuaded on that ground to withhold their further support from the Coercion Bill. In the former alternative the corn laws might be saved, in both the Ministry would be destroyed.

The dramatic interest of the session turns wholly, its historical interest turns in part, on the astute but not perhaps too patriotic way in which this dilemma was worked by the consummate strategy of Disraeli, and the obstinate pertinacity of Bentinck. Peel declined to postpone the Corn and Customs Bill even to the alleged necessity of maintaining peace in Ireland, and after a decent interval of hesitation, the Opposition, which had now composed its personal difficulties, agreed to combine with O'Connell and his followers and with the malcontent adherents of Bentinck and Disraeli in opposition to the further progress of the Coercion Bill. The combination proved fatal to the Bill, and the defeat of the measure terminated the existence of the Ministry, shattered for a time a great historical party, and brought to a dramatic close the official career of a great minister of the Crown. But the corn laws were repealed, and at the cost of a great party disruption England was once for all emancipated by Peel's patriotism and statesmanship from a fiscal system which had hampered her commerce, starved her industry, and brought her people within measurable distance of revolution. On the same day that the Corn and Customs Bill received the royal assent Peel was placed in a minority in the House of Commons. On the day on which the falling minister announced the dissolution of his Government he received

a despatch from America announcing that a frontier dispute with the United States, which at one time threatened to embroil the two great families of the Anglo-Saxon race in a fratricidal war, had been settled in exact accordance with the terms insisted upon by England. No minister who ever fell from power could fall with a greater assurance of his country's gratitude, and of the impartial testimony of history to the splendour of his public services, and his supreme capacity for affairs. "I shall leave," he said in his speech announcing the resignation of his Government, "a name severely censured, I fear, by many who, on public grounds, deeply regret the severance of party ties —deeply regret that severance, not from interested or personal motives, but from the firm conviction that fidelity to party engagements—the existence and maintenance of a great party—constitutes a powerful instrument of government. I shall surrender power severely censured by others who, from no interested motive, adhere to the principle of protection, considering the maintenance of it to be essential to the welfare and interests of the country; I shall leave a name execrated by every monopolist who, from less honourable motives, clamours for protection because it conduces to his own individual benefit; but it may be that I shall leave a name sometimes remembered with expressions of goodwill in the abodes of those whose lot it is to labour and to earn their daily bread with the sweat of their brow, when they shall recruit their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened with a sense of injustice."

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

1846–1850

THERE is not much more to tell. Peel lived for four years longer, and but for the deplorable accident which ended his life he might have outlived Palmerston, who was four years his senior, and witnessed the recovery of parties from the shock which dislocated them in 1846. But for the rest of his life he was a minister in retreat, a statesman with only a slender following, a politician without a party. His authority was immense, and he was never so popular or so respected as in the four years which followed his fall from power. He had no desire to return to office, and when he resigned he is said to have implored the queen never again to require him to serve her as minister. He wrote to Hardinge a few days after his fall, "I have every disposition to forgive my enemies for having conferred upon me the blessing of the loss of power," and there is no doubt that the feeling was perfectly sincere. He was not greedy of power for its own sake; he was no longer young—he was fifty-eight when he ceased to be Prime Minister; his physical temperament was not a sanguine

one; the successive fates of Castlereagh, of Liverpool, and of Canning, spoke to him in tones of warning of the inexorable strain of public affairs, and his overwrought nerves accepted the omen conveyed in Macaulay's statement that no man past sixty had ever led the House of Commons,—a generalisation so soon to be overthrown by three men who were then sitting in the House of Commons with Macaulay. But whatever his personal feeling and intentions may have been, it is clear, from the state of parties, that during the few years which remained to him no question of his return to power could disturb the fallen minister's repose. His former followers were scattered; those who adhered to him were, as was said at the time, a handful of statesmen without a party, the remainder a party without statesmen. In these circumstances Peel's course was clear. Recognising that no Government was possible except that which succeeded him, he resolved to give that Government an independent support, and especially to assist it in defending, maintaining, and developing the policy of free trade, for which he had made so heavy and withal so patriotic a sacrifice. Accordingly, on almost every important question which arose in the four years from 1846 to 1850, Sir Robert Peel gave the assistance of his immense public authority to the Ministry which supplanted him. Those were the years of the Irish famine followed by an abortive rebellion, of the Revolution in France, of the Chartist agitation in England, of the railway mania and its attendant financial crises, involving renewed attacks on the policy of the Bank Charter Act, of the Spanish marriages, and other excitements and anxieties in the department of

foreign affairs, of the adjustment of the sugar duties to the principles of free trade—a matter in which Peel patriotically surrendered his own convictions to the paramount necessity of protecting free trade from the renewed assaults of its enemies—of the repeal of the Navigation Laws, and of the passing of the Encumbered Estates Act for Ireland. The detailed history of these measures and transactions belongs not so much to Peel's biography as to the general history of the time, and to the particular history of the Whig Administration of 1846. For four years that Administration lived and throve in very critical and troublous times upon Peel's patriotic and independent support, and after his death it gradually tottered to its own dissolution. He was determined that no personal considerations, no mere party prepossessions, and no considerations, less than vital, even of public policy, should give the protectionists—still active, still powerful, and still thirsting for revenge—a chance of destroying his handiwork by overthrowing the Government to which the custody of free trade had been committed. This was the last public service of his life, and in many respects it was the most beneficent as it was certainly the most disinterested.

There was, however, one department of public policy in regard to which, at the close of the period under review, Peel, after four years' experience, declined to give his countenance to the Whig Government. This was the department of foreign affairs, then conducted by Palmerston with infinite capacity, audacity, and resource, but with too little regard for the proper amenities of diplomacy, the true dignity of his country, and the legitimate susceptibilities of foreign nations.

Of Peel's own conduct of foreign affairs little has been said in the foregoing pages. It is not one of the dominant characteristics of his statesmanship. Properly speaking, as Guizot remarks, he had no foreign policy at all. He had no continental or transmarine ambitions, and his only relation to foreign affairs arose, as every British statesman's relation to foreign affairs must primarily arise, out of his jealous guardianship of British interests as affected by the action of other nations. He desired his country to live in peace with all the world, to conduct its relations with other states on a footing of justice and good faith, of courtesy and forbearance, and in particular to maintain a cordial understanding with its nearest neighbour France. In the pursuit of this moderate, rational, and unadventurous policy he was ably seconded by his Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, a statesman of diplomatic temper thoroughly in accord with his own, whose subsequent failure to avert the Crimean War has perhaps unjustly clouded the memory of his rare personal gifts and his great services to the State. Peel and Aberdeen, both trained in the school of Liverpool and Castlereagh, were perhaps lacking in those popular sympathies which gave Palmerston his strength. Their strength lay in an equitable spirit of mutual concession and respect, in an international demeanour which never lowered the dignity of England by wounding the dignity of other powers, which never sacrificed the rights and interests of England, nor ignored the rights and interests of her neighbours, in short, in a diplomatic temper the very reverse of Palmerston's. When they took office in 1841 they found war raging in

China and Afghanistan. They found France estranged and mortified by Palmerston's policy in the East. They found serious differences existing with France and the United States over the right of search, and still more serious differences existing with the United States alone over the still unsettled boundary questions on both sides of the North American Continent. When they quitted office, peace had long been restored in the East, and the boundary questions in the West had been settled by two successive treaties, the first of which was denounced by Palmerston as a capitulation, though it healed a long standing sore between the two countries, while the second removed a menacing difficulty from Palmerston's own path. The relations of England and France, moreover, had been restored to a friendly footing, although they had been seriously strained at times by the now almost forgotten "Pritchard" incident in the South Seas—an incident described by Peel in his last speech as "one of the most stupid and foolish causes of war that ever arose"—and by the brief but decisive war between France and Morocco; and the question of the right of search had ceased to give anxiety to statesmen. These results were achieved by methods which did infinite credit to the statesmanship of Peel and the diplomacy of Aberdeen, though Palmerston was their unsparing critic in Parliament, and the unfailing exponent of their opposites in his own conduct of foreign affairs. The impartial verdict of history will scarcely give to Palmerston the higher credit, even in the department of public affairs with which his name and fame are specially associated.

In the last speech ever made by him in the House

of Commons Peel was called upon to review the foreign policy of Palmerston. The incidents of that policy, its astonishing audacity and recklessness, and the dramatic fall it entailed on the minister who was responsible for it, are among the best known and best remembered episodes of our recent history, and need not detain us here. It suffices to say that the special subject of debate was the famous "Don Pacifico" incident, in the treatment of which Palmerston had displayed all his well-known characteristics, and by subjecting Greece to the humiliation of a naval blockade had provoked the resentment of France and Russia. A vote of censure on his conduct had been carried in the House of Lords. By way of counterpoise Roebuck, an adherent of the Ministry, though a politician who bore party trammels very uneasily, proposed a resolution in the House of Commons directly approving the foreign policy of the Government. Palmerston defended himself in a memorable speech which lasted from the dusk of one day to the dawn of the next, and was, in fact, a masterly apology for his general conduct of foreign affairs. Peel himself, though he declined to express his approval of the minister's policy, described his speech as "that most able and temperate speech which made us proud of the man who delivered it, vindicating, with becoming spirit, and with an ability worthy of his name, the policy and conduct he pursued."

If a direct vote of censure had been in question, Peel would probably have hesitated to support it. He declined nevertheless to support what was virtually a direct vote of confidence. He had no desire to displace the

Government or to dislocate it by the overthrow of Palmerston. But he could not so far do violence to the humane and temperate principles which had governed his own treatment of foreign relations as to give a formal approval to methods which violated them at every turn. In a speech of admirable temper, breathing in every line that spirit of urbanity, humanity, and equity, which befits the statesman who, while stoutly maintaining his country's interests, is never unmindful of the dignity of other nations, he addressed the Ministry in tones of wise admonition and regretful disapproval. Had he foreseen the tragedy of the next few hours he could scarcely have wished to omit or to alter a word; had he known that this was his last public utterance, he could have desired to leave no nobler legacy to his countrymen. "What is this diplomacy?" he said, in a passage of universal application, "It is a costly engine for maintaining peace. It is a remarkable instrument used by civilised nations for the purpose of preventing war. Unless it be used for that purpose—unless it be used to appease the angry passions of individual men, and check the feelings which arise out of national resentment—unless it be used for that purpose, it is an instrument not only costly but mischievous. If then your application of diplomacy be to fester every wound, to provoke instead of soothing resentments, to place a minister in every court of Europe for the purpose, not of preventing quarrels, or of adjusting quarrels, but for the purpose of continuing an angry correspondence in this place, or of promoting what is supposed to be an English interest by keeping up conflicts with the representatives

of other powers, then I say that not only is the expenditure upon this costly instrument thrown away, but this great engine, used by civilised society for the purpose of maintaining peace, is perverted into a cause of hostility and war."

This memorable debate lasted till past daybreak on the morning of 29th June 1850. Peel, as he walked home in the bright summer morning, said to the friend who accompanied him that he felt at peace with all men. It is said that on the following day both he and Lady Peel were oppressed with a feeling of despondency and a sense of impending evil for which there was nothing to account. After a few hours' rest he attended a meeting of the Commissioners of the proposed Great Exhibition of 1851. Late in the afternoon he went out for his accustomed ride on horseback, Lady Peel having specially urged him to do so as a means of shaking off the despondency which oppressed him. After leaving his name at Buckingham Palace, he proceeded along Constitution Hill, where his horse being startled became suddenly restive, and Peel, who was always a careless and never a very skilful horseman, was thrown violently to the ground. Assistance was promptly at hand, and a passing carriage conveyed the stricken statesman, whose injuries were already ascertained to be serious, in a fainting condition to his residence in Whitehall Gardens. On his arrival he recovered himself slightly and walked into the house, where he was met by Lady Peel, who had already been told of the accident. The meeting overpowered him, and he swooned in the arms of the physician who had witnessed the accident and accompanied him to his house. He was laid on a sofa in the

dining-room, which he never quitted alive. His own physicians were soon in attendance, but so acute was his agony that it was found impossible to reduce the fractured clavicle or to ascertain the full extent of his other injuries. For three days he lingered in intense torture, followed by severe prostration, but at intervals he recovered consciousness and self-command sufficiently to enable him to take leave of his family and a few of his more intimate friends, and to receive the sacrament at the hands of Dr. Tomlinson, the Bishop of Gibraltar. A few minutes after eleven on the night of Tuesday, 2d July, he ceased to breathe. During his brief illness the country was hushed in sorrow, and at his death the public grief was universal and profound. "Now," said Mr. Gladstone in the House of Commons,

> "Now is the stately column broke,
> The beacon light is quenched in smoke;
> The trumpet's silver voice is still,
> The warder silent on the hill."

"Death hath this also, that it openeth the gate to good fame, and extinguisheth envy." If, as he left the House of Commons for the last time, Sir Robert Peel could feel at peace with all men, there were certainly few in the land, even of those who had been at bitter strife with him, who did not feel and acknowledge that his premature death, though it had impoverished the State, had indeed opened the gate to good fame and extinguished envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness in the recollection of his splendid powers and magnificent achievements.

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